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THE AFRICAN CAPACITY
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DES CAPACITES EN AFRIQUE



Capacity Building for Women and youth in Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, and Gabon

Funded by: African Capacity Building Foundation
(ACBF) Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa
(BADEA) Islamic Development Bank (IsDB)

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I. Introduction

The Capacity Building for Women and Youth Empowerment in the Agricultural Sector Project is a strategic initiative jointly implemented by the African Capacity Building Foundation ([ACBF](#)), the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa ([BADEA](#)), and the Islamic Development Bank ([IsDB](#)). This collaborative effort aims to enhance agricultural development and promote the economic inclusion of women and youth across Africa.

As the executing agency, **ACBF** leads project coordination and monitoring, leveraging its extensive experience in capacity development, governance, and regional integration. It also fosters partnerships with national entities to support effective in-country implementation.

BADEA reinforces South-South cooperation, particularly between Arab and sub-Saharan African nations. Its support is vital in advancing agricultural progress and improving livelihoods for disadvantaged populations, with a special focus on women and youth.

IsDB contributes both funding and technical expertise, ensuring the initiative aligns with Islamic finance principles and delivers tangible socio-economic benefits to member countries. The Bank's involvement supports its broader mission to drive inclusive and sustainable development.

The project targets **Burkina Faso, Gabon, and Sierra Leone**, aiming to enhance the role and impact of women and youth in agricultural value chains through capacity development, entrepreneurship, and institutional strengthening.

The project stems from a shared commitment among the three partner institutions to promote inclusive economic development and address structural barriers affecting vulnerable groups in agriculture. It was formally launched following the approval of the partnership in **April 2022** and was further refined through a **revised [Project Implementation Plan \(PIP\)](#)** dated **October 19, 2023**. This revision drew from findings of in-depth scoping studies and broad-based stakeholder consultations conducted in each target country.

The revision, led by consultant Dr. Fadel Ndiame in close collaboration with national stakeholders and ACBF, highlighted key priorities, adjusted timelines, and emphasized the importance of capturing knowledge and best practices for potential scale-up across the continent. A central goal is to support women and youth cooperatives and associations in overcoming systemic barriers that prevent their full participation in higher-value segments of the agricultural economy. Women and youth constitute a significant portion of the agricultural labor force across sub-Saharan Africa. However, their involvement is often limited to lower-level activities in the value chain due to constraints such as limited access to land, finance, and technical knowledge. This project seeks to

bridge those gaps and create pathways for these groups to play more strategic roles in agricultural transformation.

In **Burkina Faso, Gabon, and Sierra Leone**, women and youth face persistent structural challenges that hinder their full participation in the agricultural economy. These challenges, identified through comprehensive scoping studies, include:

- **Limited access to finance and credit:** Due to lack of collateral and formal banking relationships.
- **Restricted land ownership rights:** Especially for women, due to legal and customary constraints.
- **Insufficient access to training and technical knowledge:** Resulting in low productivity and limited market access.
- **Underdeveloped support structures and business incubation services.**
- **Negative perceptions among youth regarding agriculture,** particularly in urbanized countries like Gabon.

Despite these obstacles, the agricultural sector presents **immense potential** for job creation and inclusive growth. For example, Gabon imports up to **60% of its food needs**, despite having over **5 million hectares of cultivable land** and a favorable tropical climate. Similarly, Sierra Leone and Burkina Faso have vibrant rural populations and active producer groups that, with proper support, could significantly contribute to national food security and economic resilience.

The project was therefore designed as a **strategic response** to these realities. It aims not only to **build individual capacities** through training and coaching, but also to **strengthen institutions, improve access to finance, and catalyze entrepreneurship** among women and youth. By addressing both human and systemic capacity gaps, the initiative contributes to broader goals of **poverty reduction, food security, gender equality, and economic transformation** in the target countries and beyond.

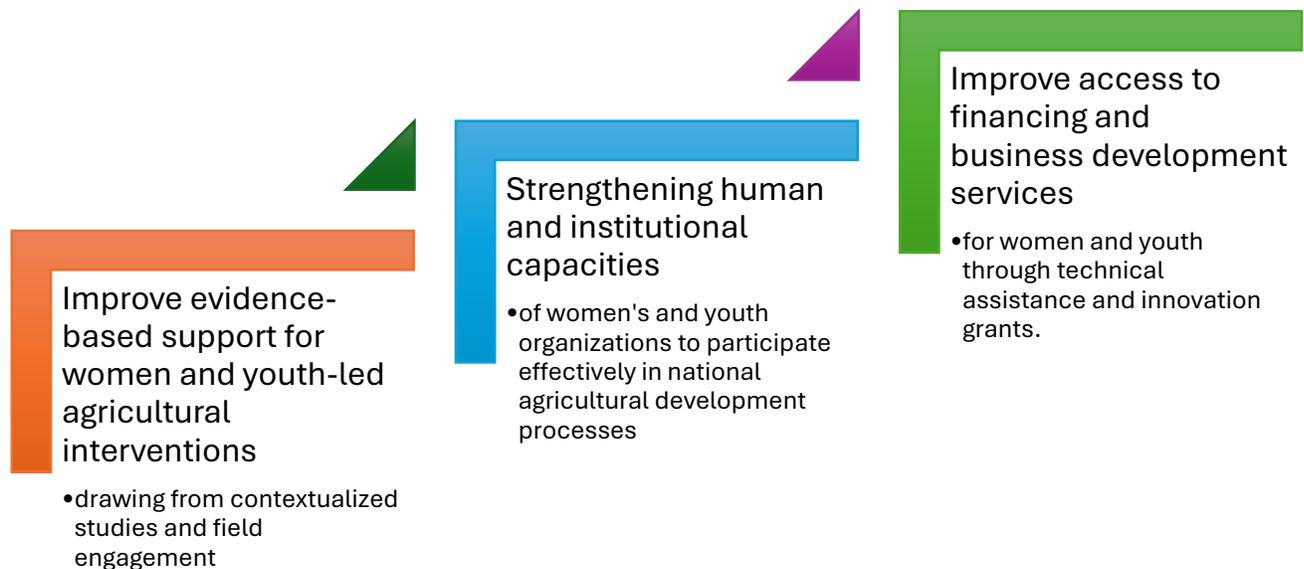
II. Background

The *Capacity Building for Women and Youth Empowerment in the Agricultural Sector* is a multi-country initiative implemented by the **African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF)** in collaboration with the **Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA)** and the **Islamic Development Bank (IsDB)**. The project targets three African countries — **Burkina Faso, Gabon, and Sierra Leone** — with a focus on empowering women and youth in agriculture by enhancing their access to knowledge, finance, institutional support, and entrepreneurship opportunities.

The initiative directly responds to the urgent need to improve the performance and inclusivity of agricultural systems in these countries, where women and youth form a critical but underserved segment of the agricultural labor force. The project targets agricultural cooperatives and associations, with the broader aim of contributing to inclusive economic development and food security while strengthening Arab-African development cooperation.

1. Objectives

The project's implementation is guided by three interlinked objectives:



These objectives call for a holistic approach that goes beyond technical training, focusing equally on institutional reform, leadership development, and financial inclusion.

Through targeted initiatives in Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, and Gabon, the Capacity Building for Women and Youth aimed to drive systemic change by fostering inclusive participation in the agricultural sector. Activities were tailored to local realities, ensuring that women and youth were not only beneficiaries but active agents of transformation. By combining research-driven approaches, leadership development, and expanded financial access, the project created resilient ecosystems where women- and youth-led enterprises thrived and influenced broader agricultural policies and practices.

2. Scoping Studies and Foundational Research

To inform the project's design, ACBF commissioned scoping studies in each of the three target countries. These studies assessed local agricultural value chains and the status of women and youth engagement, identifying both shared and country-specific constraints and opportunities.

a) Key Challenges Identified Across Countries



The challenges highlighted in the scoping studies

Across Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, and Gabon, several critical challenges impeded the full participation of women and youth in agricultural development.

Firstly, participation in value-added agriculture remained low. Women and youth continued to be concentrated mainly in primary production, with limited involvement in higher-value activities such as processing, packaging, and marketing. Informal market structures and a lack of targeted support further restricted their advancement along the agricultural value chain.

Access to finance emerged as another significant barrier. Most women- and youth-led agribusinesses struggled to secure formal credit due to a lack of collateral, limited financial literacy, and an underdeveloped rural finance infrastructure, limiting their capacity to invest and grow.

Gendered barriers to land ownership were prevalent across all three countries. Customary practices and legal constraints systematically restricted women's access to land, while youth often lacked the necessary resources or political leverage to secure sufficient land for farming activities.

Additionally, gaps in training and access to business information posed substantial challenges. Critical skills in areas such as food safety, agribusiness planning, export standards, and market access were lacking. Moreover, women and youth had limited exposure to technical extension services and rarely connected to high-value markets, further hindering their economic potential.

Institutional weaknesses within umbrella organizations also hampered progress. Many cooperatives and producer groups exhibited poor governance structures, insufficient leadership

capacity, and a lack of resources to effectively advocate for their members or facilitate meaningful business linkages.

The underdevelopment of agribusiness incubation services presented another constraint. Existing business incubators were scarce, poorly resourced, and often not designed to meet the specific needs of agribusiness entrepreneurs, thereby limiting opportunities for women- and youth-led innovation and scaling.

Finally, sociocultural attitudes and perceptions significantly influenced engagement in agriculture. Youth, in particular, showed a declining interest in rural livelihoods. In Gabon, agriculture was often perceived as less prestigious and less profitable compared to urban employment, contributing to a steady rural exodus and weakening the agricultural labor base.

b) Opportunities Highlighted by the Studies

These opportunities are summarized in the diagram below;

Despite the challenges faced, several important opportunities emerged across Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, and Gabon to support women and youth in agriculture.

First, there is significant potential to develop value-added agribusinesses. By moving beyond primary production into areas like processing, packaging, and marketing, women and youth can capture greater profits and create more resilient businesses. Encouraging value chain development can also stimulate job creation in rural communities.

Innovative financing solutions offer another opportunity. Tailored financial products such as microloans, group savings schemes, and digital banking can help overcome barriers to credit access. Strengthening financial literacy and partnering with rural financial institutions can also open new pathways for agribusiness investment.

Building capacity in agribusiness and entrepreneurship remains essential. Focused training on food safety, market standards, business planning, and export readiness can equip women and youth with the skills they need to grow sustainable enterprises and access higher-value markets.

Strengthening cooperatives and farmers' organizations can provide a collective voice for women and youth. Improved governance structures, leadership training, and better service delivery can help these organizations advocate for their members, negotiate better market terms, and build stronger networks.

Rebranding agriculture as a viable and modern career path is another key opportunity. Promoting success stories, integrating technology, and demonstrating agriculture's potential for profitability and innovation can attract more young people back to farming and agribusiness.

Finally, leveraging regional trade opportunities can open new markets for women- and youth-led businesses. By connecting local production to regional and international value chains,

entrepreneurs can benefit from greater market access, increased competitiveness, and enhanced income opportunities.

Together, these opportunities provide a strong foundation for advancing inclusive agricultural development and creating lasting economic change.



While the barriers are significant, the scoping studies also revealed compelling opportunities:

- **Strong Market Demand for Food and Livestock Products**
All three countries face growing food demand and remain dependent on imports. For example, Gabon imports around **60%** of its food — signaling untapped domestic production potential.
- **Favorable Agroecological Conditions**
Gabon alone has over **5 million hectares of cultivable land** and a favorable climate, with similar underexploited potential in Sierra Leone and Burkina Faso.
- **Youth Employment as a Policy Priority**
Agriculture is increasingly recognized by governments as a pathway to addressing youth unemployment and rural poverty. The sector offers a platform for innovation and entrepreneurship when properly supported.
- **Untapped Institutional and Network Potential**
Many grassroots organizations, though currently weak, can be strengthened to serve as platforms for collective action, market access, and policy advocacy.

These findings validate the project's strategy of combining **technical training, leadership development, access to finance, and institutional strengthening** to catalyze change.

III. Implementation teams profiles

The program implementation relied essentially on the identification and enrollment of national Implementation Partners in the Target their countries. These were supported by Dr Fadel Ndiame, a Senior Consultant and his FSTS team. Their profiles are outlined below:

1) National Implementation Partners Profiles.

A cornerstone of the project's success lies in its collaboration with esteemed national implementing partners in Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, and Gabon. These organizations were meticulously selected based on their institutional credibility, operational capacity, and alignment with the project's focus on empowering women and youth in agriculture.

Burkina Faso – La Maison de l'Entreprise du Burkina Faso ([MEBF](#))

Established in 2002 with support from the World Bank, La Maison de l'Entreprise du Burkina Faso (MEBF) is a semi-public non-profit institution dedicated to promoting private sector development through entrepreneurship training and business support. MEBF has a robust track record in managing donor-funded programs, notably playing a pivotal role in the World Bank-funded Youth Employment & Skills Development project. Its national presence, with branches across all 13 regions of Burkina Faso, and its strong convening power make it an invaluable partner in mobilizing stakeholders and resources to advance the project's objectives.

Sierra Leone – Sierra Leone Chamber for Agribusiness Development ([SLeCAD](#))

The Sierra Leone Chamber for Agribusiness Development (SLeCAD) is a private sector-led platform that champions agribusiness development across Sierra Leone. Serving as a vital link between farmers, agribusiness processors, exporters, and government actors, SLeCAD offers a myriad of business development support services. The organization has been instrumental in enhancing the entrepreneurial ecosystem for women and youth-led agribusinesses, providing essential support in value chain training, business plan development, and market facilitation. SLeCAD's commitment to sustainable agribusiness is evident in its initiatives aimed at improving productivity and competitiveness at national, regional, and global markets.

Gabon – [ACT-Afrique](#) in Partnership with [ELLIPSIS](#)

In response to the withdrawal of Okoumé Capital, the consultant identified ACT-Afrique as the lead implementation partner in Gabon, collaborating with ELLIPSIS, a financial consulting firm. ACT-Afrique brings a nuanced understanding of local socio-economic dynamics and is committed to supporting public and civil society actors with strategic insights. ELLIPSIS complements this expertise by offering advisory services focused on business strategy and growth for entrepreneurs. Together, they form a formidable local alliance dedicated to building capacity for women and

youth in Gabon, ensuring the project's objectives are met with cultural relevance and operational efficiency.

2) Consultant's Institutional Expertise

The coordination and execution of this multi-country initiative is led by **Dr. Fadel Ndiame**, an accomplished agricultural economist and seasoned development strategist. He brings over two decades of experience in agricultural development, private sector engagement, and food systems transformation across Africa. The project is being implemented through his consulting firm, **Food Systems Transformations Solutions (FSTS)** — a boutique advisory company with a mission to bridge the gap between strategic vision and field-level impact in agri-food systems.

2.1. About Food Systems Transformations Solutions ([FSTS](#))

FSTS is a specialized firm supporting governments, SMEs, and private sector actors across Africa in building inclusive, sustainable, and competitive food systems. The firm's value proposition lies in its ability to bring together **policy insight, technical execution, and cross-sectoral collaboration** under one umbrella. Its areas of expertise include:

- **Strategy and Management Support:**
Providing hands-on strategic and operational guidance to ministries, agribusinesses, donors, and non-profits to improve program design, delivery, and accountability.
- **Innovative Financing Mechanisms:**
Developing green and blended finance models to de-risk investments in agriculture, improve access to capital for women and youth, and link financial institutions to viable agri-enterprises.
- **Value Creation and Processing Solutions:**
Designing interventions that support value addition in local food systems, strengthen post-harvest processing, and develop rural entrepreneurship.
- **Policy Support and Food Security Programming:**
Assisting in the formulation and roll out of policies and national programs for food security, agribusiness development, and rural livelihoods — with a focus on evidence-based and participatory methods.
- **Digital Tools and Information Systems:**
Creating models and platforms to reduce information asymmetry in the agricultural sector — improving transparency, market linkages, and decision-making.
- **Partnership Facilitation and Ecosystem Building:**
Convening diverse stakeholders — governments, donors, private sector, and civil society — around shared development objectives and supporting structured public-private dialogue.

2.2. Track Record and Regional Engagement

The mission built on Dr. Ndiame's and the FSTS team in implementing similar programs across the Continent. Most recently, in **2023**, he spearheaded the creation of **ROCAFES** (*Réseau Ouest et Centre Africain des Femmes et des Jeunes dans le Secteur Semencier*) — a groundbreaking initiative bringing together **women and youth in the seed sector** from across West and Central Africa. ROCAFES focuses on empowering these groups through policy advocacy, training, and market access support, and has rapidly gained recognition as a key platform for transformation in the seed value chain.

In this project, **Dr. Ndiame and FSTS offer not only technical implementation support, but also thought leadership and system-wide change management.** Their involvement ensures that capacity building is not treated as a one-off event, but as a continuous, learning-driven process rooted in **local ownership and regional relevance.**

Through its hybrid model — combining **advisory services, digital innovation, and grassroots engagement** — FSTS exemplifies the type of consulting partner needed to implement complex, multi-stakeholder programs with lasting impact.

IV. Project Implementation Approach

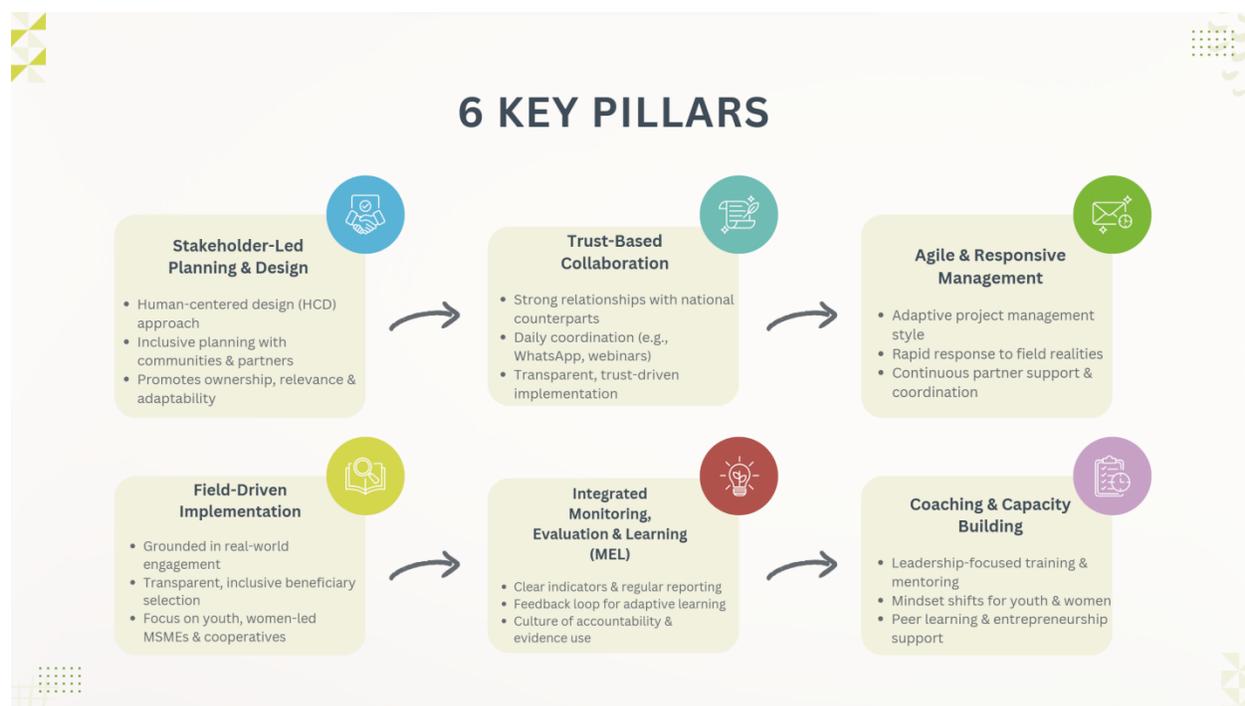
4.1. Our approach

The implementation of this project took place in a complex and dynamic context, marked by time pressures, institutional transitions, and the need for rapid operationalization across three countries with distinct socio-political realities. Under the leadership of Food Systems Transformations Solutions (FSTS), the strategy moved beyond conventional execution models and embraced an adaptive, systems-based approach grounded in **Human-Centered Design (HCD), participatory methods,** and agile project management.



This hybrid approach recognized that lasting impact can only be achieved through locally grounded solutions co-created with stakeholders. End users, implementing partners, and community actors were engaged from the outset—not only as beneficiaries but as co-architects of the program’s design, delivery, and continuous refinement.

The implementation strategy was structured around **six key pillars**, each reflecting a synthesis of field-based innovation and participatory development best practices:



4.2. Stakeholder-Led Planning and Design

At the heart of the implementation strategy was a **participatory planning process** that involved end users, implementing partners, and community leaders at every stage. Guided by HCD principles, this inclusive approach:

- Ensured that interventions were rooted in the actual needs and aspirations of the communities.
- Enabled value chain actors to shape the solutions that would directly affect them.
- Promoted ownership, legitimacy, and long-term relevance of the outcomes.

This approach helped mitigate the risks typically associated with top-down program design and strengthened the program’s adaptive capacity in the face of shifting conditions.

4.2. Trust-Based Collaboration with National Partners

FSTS placed a strong emphasis on **building authentic relationships with national counterparts**, recognizing that sustainable development cannot occur without local leadership. To operationalize this:

- Dedicated communication channels (e.g., WhatsApp groups) facilitated daily coordination;
- Biweekly regional webinars created space for peer learning and experience sharing;
- A collaborative mindset enabled joint problem-solving and context-specific adaptations.

These mechanisms helped foster deep trust, transparency, and ownership, critical to project continuity and resilience.

4.3. Agile and Responsive Project Management

Recognizing the need for flexibility in dynamic environments, the project adopted an **agile project management** model. This enabled rapid response to emerging challenges, such as the restructuring of partnerships in Gabon, and supported consistent alignment with field realities.

Key elements included:

- Continuous project management support to national implementing partners;
- Real-time adjustments to work plans based on stakeholder feedback and on-the-ground learning;
- Ongoing coordination with ACBF and funding partners to maintain accountability and shared direction.

4.5. Field-Driven Implementation and Rigorous Beneficiary Selection

Rather than relying solely on desk-based research, FSTS grounded its implementation in **extensive field engagement**. Field teams collaborated with national partners to travel widely—visiting entrepreneurs, cooperatives, and grassroots leaders across diverse geographies.

The **beneficiary selection process** was transparent, inclusive, and evidence-based:

- Open calls for applications ensured broad access;
- Applicants were screened using pre-set technical and institutional performance indicators;
- Site visits and physical verifications helped assess operational capacity and validate information.

This pillar ensured that selected beneficiaries—particularly **youth and women-led MSMEs and cooperatives**—had both the potential and commitment to scale their impact.

4.6. Integrated Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL)

A robust **Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)** framework was developed collaboratively, ensuring that implementing partners could consistently track progress and assess results. With support from the Impact Measurement Officer, the M&E approach:

- Defined clear, actionable indicators aligned with project outcomes;
- Enabled partners to report regularly on key metrics;
- Created a feedback loop for adaptive learning and decision-making.

This commitment to measurement went beyond compliance, fostering a culture of **evidence-driven refinement** and accountability throughout implementation.

4.7. Coaching, Capacity Strengthening, and Mindset Development

Technical assistance alone is not enough to catalyze transformation. FSTS embedded a **coaching-centered approach** to unlock leadership potential, build confidence, and shift mindsets—particularly among youth and women.

- Trainers were selected for both technical know-how and leadership capacity;
- They served as catalysts and mentors, helping create a multiplier effect through peer-to-peer learning;
- Agricultural entrepreneurship was reframed as a **dynamic and dignified career path**, promoting inclusive growth.

This holistic capacity-building model complemented the technical aspects of the project by empowering individuals to lead their own development journeys.

V. Deliverables and timelines of the consultancy

This section provides a high-level summary of the project implementation objectives and the targeted implementation schedule

5.1. The principal deliveries:

They have been defined in the TOR of the mission as follows, with specific timelines outlines below:

- [Inception report](#)
- [Project Launch report](#)
- Activities planned in the Project Implementation plan successfully completed within the agreed timeline as per work plan. (see table2 below)
 - [Periodic Project Implementation reports to support the payment of the consultancy fees, as described in Table below.](#)
 - A midterm Implementation report by 30th November 2024. This report will be used to inform the donors (BADEA and IsDB)
 - Project Final report by 30th of April 2025

Access all Documentation [HERE](#)

The table1 below outlines delivery dates for the outputs of this contract.

Deliverable	Date	Deliverable description
Inception Report of the mission	6 May 2024	Inception report is submitted with the consultant work plan and recommendations
Launch of the project	1 June 2024	The project is officially launched
First progress update against activities planned in the Project Implementation plan submitted and approved (3 months after project start).	30 July 2024	1 st Progress Update - success - weaknesses - challenges - opportunities Key learnings
Second progress update against activities planned in the Project Implementation plan submitted and approved (6 months after project start).	15 Octobre 2024	2 nd Progress Update - success - weaknesses - challenges - opportunities Key learnings
Third progress update against activities planned in the Project Implementation plan submitted and approved (9 months after project start).	15 December 2024	3 rd Progress Update: - Successes - Weaknesses - Challenges - Opportunities Key learnings
Partner reports and Project Final report submitted and approved.	10 April 2024	The final Project Report Successes - Weaknesses - Challenges - Opportunities Key learnings Recommendations to ACBF and its Partners

5.2. PROJECT WORK PLAN

Activities	2024	2025
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	Q1			Q2			Q3			Q4			Q1		
Signature of agreements with implementing partners in the country and disbursement of project funds	■	■	■												
Component 1															
Activity 1.1: Project Launch	■	■	■												
Component 2															
Activity 2.1: Training of trainers			■												
Activity 2.2: Training in agri-food management and entrepreneurship				■											
Activity 2.3 Leadership training and coaching					■										
Activity 2.4: Training of female coaches							■	■							
Component 3: Support for the intensification of agro-industry development								■							
Activity 3.1: Training of leaders and managers of agri-food incubators										■	■				
Activity 3.2: Exchange visit														■	
Activity 3.3 Grant provision											■				
Activity 3.4 Grant Monitoring											■	■	■	■	
Activity 4: Project closure														■	■

VI. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

1) Sierra Leone

In April 2024, the **Sierra Leone Chamber for Agribusiness Development (SLeCAD)** signed an implementation agreement with the **African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF)** to deliver the Sierra Leone component of the *Capacity Building for Women and Youth Empowerment in the Agricultural Sector* project. Funded by the **Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA)** and the **Islamic Development Bank (IsDB)**, this regional initiative focuses on strengthening the capacities of women- and youth-led agricultural cooperatives and MSMEs, contributing to inclusive growth and sustainable development in Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, and Gabon.

Between April 2024 and April 2025, SLeCAD implemented the project in Sierra Leone, targeting women- and youth-led agricultural cooperatives and MSMEs. Key activities included stakeholder

engagement, needs assessments, extensive capacity-building training, leadership coaching, Training of Trainers (ToT) programs, support for incubators, and the awarding of innovation grants. Despite logistical and funding delays, the project successfully trained 120 MSMEs and developed a strong pipeline of promising agribusiness entrepreneurs prepared for market integration and trade opportunities.

SLeCAD was tasked with leading implementation in Sierra Leone, aligning the project with the national **Feed Salone** agenda by equipping selected agribusinesses with the tools to grow competitive, resilient, and inclusive agribusinesses.

- **Stakeholder Engagement and Beneficiary Identification**

Project implementation began with intensive stakeholder consultations at national and district levels. These engagements brought together representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, local councils, chiefdom authorities, farmer federations, and private agribusinesses.

At the district level, SLeCAD organized sensitization sessions to ensure alignment with local development priorities. A needs assessment of over 120 women and youth-led MSMEs and farmers was conducted, evaluating skills gaps, market access challenges, business readiness, and financial constraints. This data informed the design of tailored training modules and mentorship approaches.

SLeCAD also performed a value chain and ecosystem analysis, mapping actors and bottlenecks across targeted agricultural sub-sectors. This guided the identification of opportunities to support MSMEs through access to inputs, finance, and structured markets.

- **Project Launch – Port Loko District**

The official project launch was held on July 11, 2024, in Port Loko District—a key agricultural hub chosen for its strong community engagement and productive potential. Attendees included:

- Officials from the Ministry of Agriculture and other government bodies;
- Local chiefs and district leaders;
- Women and youth farmers;
- Agribusiness associations and civil society actors.

The event's purpose was to promote awareness, foster ownership, and mobilize support among stakeholders. In his opening remarks, Deputy Paramount Chief of Gbakeh Loko Chiefdom praised the project and urged communities to take full advantage of the opportunity.

SLeCAD's Executive Secretary, Ahmed Nanoh, emphasized the transformative intent of the project—to shift women and youth from subsistence activities to structured agribusiness. He noted that women make up 43% of the agricultural workforce but face major barriers in accessing land, finance, and services. He affirmed the project's goal to build the capacity of 250 agribusiness MSMEs led by women and youth, highlighting its alignment with Sierra Leone's broader food security goals.



- **Pre-Launch Activities and National-Level Engagement**

Ahead of the district launch, SLeCAD held a pre-launch meeting in Freetown involving 78 participants from government, private sector, donor agencies, and business associations. The session presented the project strategy, clarified roles, and initiated conversations around business plan development and financial inclusion for MSMEs.

The meeting strengthened stakeholder understanding of the project’s objectives and stimulated early interest from agribusiness actors in co-creating investment opportunities. Participants discussed their roles in ensuring accountability, sustainability, and integration with national programs such as Feed Salone.

- **Beneficiary Selection and Training of Trainers (ToT)**

To build local delivery capacity, SLeCAD launched a competitive process to select 30 Training of Trainers (ToTs). Over 55 applications were received, followed by interviews and screening to identify 25 high-potential candidates. Trainers were selected from a mix of professional networks and grassroots organizations.

ToT sessions were led by qualified facilitators from SLeCAD and the International Trade Centre (ITC) network. The training focused on entrepreneurship, agribusiness planning, coaching techniques, and value chain orientation. During this period, Dr. Fadel Ndiame, ACBF's lead technical consultant, addressed the group, encouraging them to lead with vision, confidence, and a growth mindset. He emphasized their role not just as trainers, but as mentors and local changemakers.



- **Community Participation and Testimonials**

The launch and early training phases were marked by strong community participation and powerful personal stories that demonstrated the project's early impact:

- **Mohamed Alie Fargo Kanu**, a business graduate and ToT trainee, spoke about transitioning into agriculture inspired by his mother's small-scale farming. He challenged perceptions of agriculture as a fallback profession, calling for youth to embrace agribusiness as a serious career path.
- **Mrs. Mani**, an experienced agripreneur in onion farming and livestock, praised past SLeCAD trainings that enabled her to scale her enterprise. She encouraged women to fully embrace the opportunity provided by ACBF, committing to use new skills and funding responsibly.

These voices reinforced the project's relevance, with participants viewing it not just as a funding opportunity, but as a pathway to transformation and dignity through agriculture.



- **Government Collaboration and Strategic Alignment**

From October 21–24, 2024, Dr. Fadel Ndiame conducted a monitoring and learning visit to Sierra Leone. On October 22, he met with Hon. Dr. Henry Musa Kpaka, Minister of Agriculture and Food Security.

Dr. Ndiame highlighted the project’s alignment with the Feed Salone strategy and shared ACBF’s vision to mobilize additional resources for capacity building in agriculture. He also referenced SLeCAD’s involvement in supporting 10 youth and women participants in a Brazil-based training program focused on the cassava value chain.

The Hon. Minister welcomed the initiative, reaffirmed SLeCAD’s central role in implementing Feed Salone, and encouraged ACBF to explore further funding opportunities to expand the program’s reach.

- **Engagement with Brazil Trainees**

During his visit, Dr. Ndiame also met with **Brazil-trained agripreneurs** to discuss how they intended to apply lessons learned. Participants shared ideas for scaling their businesses, along with challenges such as:

- Limited access to finance;
- Infrastructure and logistics barriers;
- The need for supportive policies and standards.

Dr. Ndiame encouraged a shift in mindset—from survival-mode entrepreneurship to opportunity-driven, scalable enterprises. He reaffirmed that the ACBF project would support promising businesses with training, coaching, and where applicable, grant funding.

- **Results and Key Outcomes**

By the close of the launch and ToT phases, several outcomes had been achieved:

- **Institutional buy-in:** Ministries, district officials, and farmer networks endorsed and supported the project;
- **Stakeholder alignment:** 78 national and local actors understood their roles and committed to implementation;
- **Transparent selection:** The ToT selection process was merit-based and inclusive;
- **Training infrastructure activated:** ToTs are now equipped to begin cascade training for wider beneficiary groups;
- **Community enthusiasm:** Youth and women showed readiness to take leadership roles in agribusiness transformation;
- **Value chain focus:** Activities were grounded in clear sectoral analysis to ensure relevance and impact.
- • **Increased Business Viability:** Beneficiaries reported improved business planning, management skills, and expanded market strategies.
- • **Higher Income and Job Creation:** 83% of beneficiaries expected increased income and job opportunities post-training.
- • **Enhanced Leadership:** 45 emerging leaders developed strategic leadership and decision-making skills.
- • **Grant Funding:** Six MSMEs received \$5,000 each to scale operations in high-growth value chains (cassava and onion).
- • **First Agribusiness Incubator Training:** Strengthened the support ecosystem for women and youth entrepreneurs.
- • **Regional Exposure:** Exchange visit to Brazil enhanced cross-country learning in cassava production and agro-processing.
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- **Strategic Insights**

The Sierra Leone launch underscores key lessons for implementation in similar contexts:

- **Early and inclusive engagement builds ownership** and sets a solid foundation for sustainability;
- **Training is more effective when paired with coaching and mentorship**, particularly for young and first-time entrepreneurs;
- **Transparent selection and a bottom-up approach improve trust** and ensure the right beneficiaries are reached;
- **Agribusiness development must integrate ecosystem support**, linking producers with markets, services, and finance.
- **• Tailored Capacity Building:** Sector-specific training boosted market access and sustainability of MSMEs.
- **• Leadership and Coaching:** Empowering youth and women leaders is essential for the transformation of rural economies.
- **• Innovative Financing Needs:** Access to capital remains a key constraint; blended financing models are needed.
- **• Market Linkages:** Building regional and export market access through platforms like AfCFTA is crucial for scaling businesses.
- **• Value Chain Organization:** A more structured approach to value chain integration (especially cassava and onion) is needed.

This initial phase has laid the groundwork for impactful project delivery and long-term transformation in Sierra Leone’s agribusiness landscape.

Project Implementation Strategy

The Sierra Leone Chamber for Agribusiness Development (SLCAD) took a strategic approach to ensure the effective implementation of the project in Sierra Leone. The initiative aligned closely with the national Feed Salone agenda, a program that seeks to promote food security and enhance the competitiveness of Sierra Leone’s agricultural sector. To ensure that the project met local needs, a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process was carried out at both the national and district levels. This was followed by the identification of target beneficiaries, the design of customized training modules, and the implementation of a robust mentorship program.

									
Project Implementation report ACBF Capacity Building Project for Women and Youth Entrepreneurs									
No.	Activities	Target	Achievement						Observations
			Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	
Period of reporting: September 2023 to August 2024 Date of report: May 10, 2024									
Pre-conditions: signing of agreements with partners within the country, implementing partners, and disbursement of project funds.									
1.1	Project launch event	150 participants attended, with 70 from the district and the national Chamber	X						Government, development partners, and project partners, with coordinated and relevant value chains coordinated the project for comprehensive and holistic food security, collaboration, and capacity building. On the 17 th of July 2023, women and youth agribusiness (MSME) and other partners are essential to ACBF, BADEA, and ISDB to increase funding to improve more women and youth agribusiness (MSME) to enhance food economic engagement through the project.
Component 1									
2.1	Training of trainers	25 trainers					X	X	Over 100 certified FPC, GIZ, and GIZ trainers were in their grassroots and FPC for the training, but only 25 were selected for the training.
Component 2									
2.2	Training in agribusiness management and entrepreneurship	120 women and youth agribusiness						X	Over 100 women and youth MSMEs expressed interest in the training, and the 120 selected for training were expected to access the grant financing.
2.3	Leadership training and coaching	45 women and youth						X	A high number of women and youth MSMEs submitted expressions of interest for the leadership and mentorship training, making the selection process highly competitive due to the high level of interest and competence skills in the competition.
2.4	Training of female coaches	20 women						X	Expressions from female coaches selected for the training was timely and impressive, and added to their engagement and capacity building of female coaches to ensure the economic empowerment of women in Sierra Leone and Africa.
Component 3: Support to scale up enterprise development									
3.1	Training for business managers of agribusiness incubators	10 women and youth						X	Incubators trained were excited about the training as they are the first agribusiness training for incubators in our field in Sierra Leone and expressed their additional training for scaling and new businesses in the country. The study will be conducted jointly with ACBF.
3.2	Fieldwork visit							X	Quick training has not been conducted and successful in 10 weeks. Due to the issue of the funds, the proposer to engage with WFP and other partners to address the training and other constraints to ensure the sustainable way forward for grant financing. It is recommended to work with the donor and financial institutions.
3.3	Provide grant funding							X	
Outcome addressing									

A. Preparation Phase

a. Stakeholder Engagement and Beneficiary Identification

Stakeholder engagement began with a series of consultations at the national and district levels to ensure that the project would be aligned with local development priorities and national agricultural strategies. The engagement process involved representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, local councils, chiefdom authorities, farmer federations, private agribusinesses, and other relevant actors. These discussions helped define the project's scope, objectives, and areas of intervention, ensuring that the project was responsive to the needs of the local agricultural community.

In addition to stakeholder consultations, SLeCAD conducted a thorough needs assessment of over 120 women- and youth-led MSMEs, farmers, and cooperatives. This assessment aimed to identify key challenges such as skills gaps, market access barriers, business readiness, and financial constraints. The findings from the needs assessment informed the design of tailored training and mentorship approaches, allowing the project to address the specific needs of its beneficiaries effectively.

b. Market Value Chain and Ecosystem Analysis

An important component of the project was the analysis of agricultural value chains to understand the dynamics and identify opportunities for growth and improvement. SLeCAD performed a detailed value chain analysis for sectors such as cassava, onions, and renewable energy, focusing on key actors and bottlenecks within these value chains. This analysis not only provided insight into the specific challenges faced by agribusinesses but also highlighted potential areas where interventions could have the greatest impact, such as improving access to inputs, financing, and structured markets.

B. Training and Capacity Building Activities

i) Training of Trainers (ToT) Program

As part of the capacity-building component of the project, SLeCAD launched a competitive process to select 30 trainers from a pool of over 55 applicants. The selected trainers underwent comprehensive training in entrepreneurship, agribusiness planning, coaching techniques, and value chain orientation. The training was delivered in collaboration with professional networks such as the International Trade Centre (ITC) and was designed to build the local capacity of trainers who would go on to deliver the same training to agripreneurs in the field. During the ToT sessions, participants were encouraged to lead with vision and confidence, while also focusing on developing a growth mindset to help empower others.

ii) Entrepreneurship and Agribusiness Training

After the ToT phase, the project selected 120 women and youth agripreneurs from a pool of over 350 applicants to participate in a comprehensive entrepreneurship and agribusiness management training program. These agripreneurs were trained on essential topics such as business management, marketing, financial literacy, and access to finance. The training aimed to equip them with the practical skills and knowledge needed to grow competitive, sustainable, and resilient agribusinesses. Additionally, participants were provided with the opportunity to apply for grants that would help them implement the skills and strategies they learned during the training.

iii) Leadership and Coaching Training

A key aspect of the project's long-term sustainability was the development of leadership capacities among women and youth agripreneurs. As part of the leadership development component, 45 emerging leaders from across Sierra Leone were trained in leadership, coaching, and mentoring. This training was designed to help these leaders support their peers and foster a culture of shared learning within their communities. In addition, 25 female coaches were trained to provide peer mentorship, enabling them to play a central role in the development and empowerment of other women and youth agripreneurs.

iv) Incubator Development and Gender-Sensitive Approaches

The project also focused on building the capacity of agribusiness incubators to support the growth and development of early-stage agribusinesses. Between January and April 2025, 10 leaders of agribusiness incubators received specialized training on how to integrate gender-sensitive approaches into their incubation services. This training aimed to ensure that incubators would provide tailored support for women and youth-led businesses, addressing specific challenges related to gender inequality in the agricultural sector.

v) Grant Process and Financial Support

An essential component of the project was the provision of grants to support the growth of promising agribusinesses. The project launched a competitive pitching process to select six agribusinesses for grant funding. Each of these businesses received a \$5,000 grant to accelerate their growth, formalize their operations, and prepare for broader market access. The grant recipients were also provided with additional training and mentorship to help them use the funding effectively and prepare for export markets, including under frameworks like AfCFTA, AGOA, and EU market protocols.

The grant process not only helped support the development of individual businesses but also fostered a competitive spirit among participants, encouraging them to innovate, improve their operations, and pursue new market opportunities. The process helped identify the most promising agribusinesses, providing them with the resources they needed to scale and expand their operations.

vi) Collaborative Ecosystem and Knowledge Sharing

Beyond the direct training and financial support, the project aimed to foster a collaborative ecosystem where beneficiaries could share knowledge, best practices, and business strategies. To

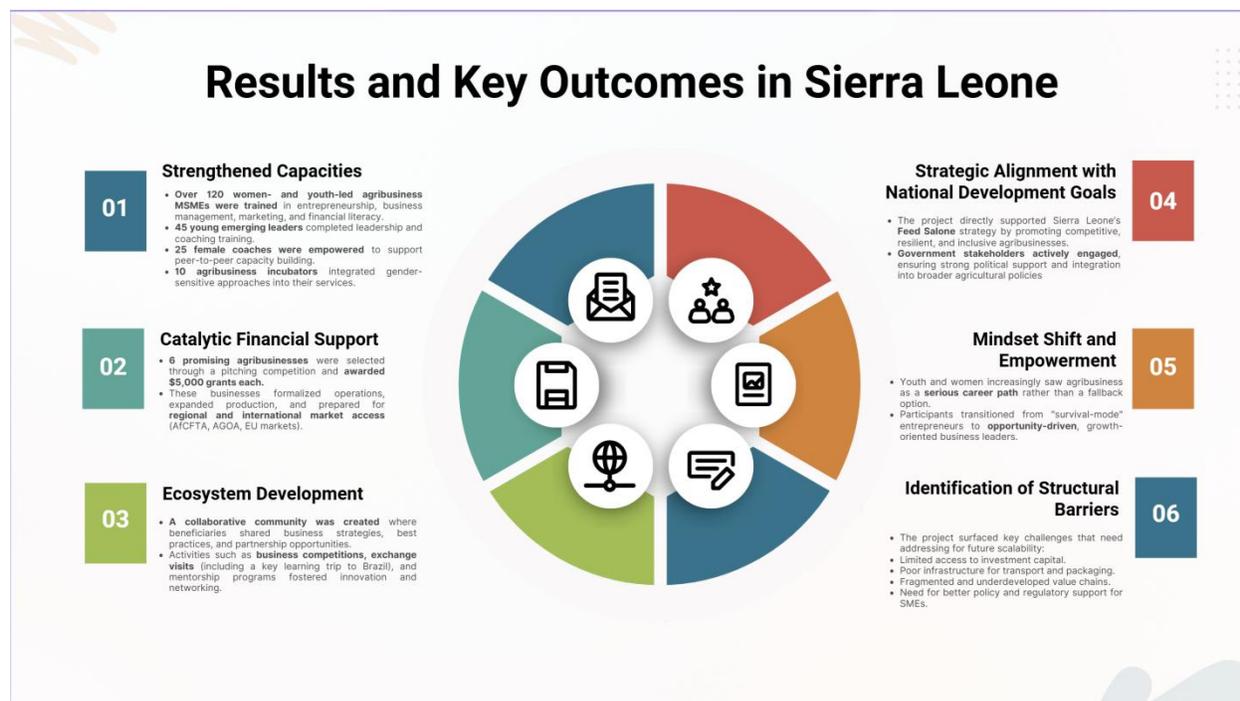
facilitate this, SLeCAD organized various activities, such as business competitions, exchange visits, and hands-on mentorship sessions. One notable exchange visit was a learning trip to Brazil, where selected agripreneurs were able to explore best practices in agro-processing and agribusiness development.

These activities provided beneficiaries with opportunities to learn from one another, collaborate on joint ventures, and build networks that would support their continued growth and success. The collaborative approach helped create a sense of community among the participants and highlighted the importance of partnership and knowledge exchange in the development of sustainable agribusinesses.

C. Training and Capacity Building Results and Key Outcomes

C.1. Summary Analysis

Provide a high level analysis of the project's outcomes



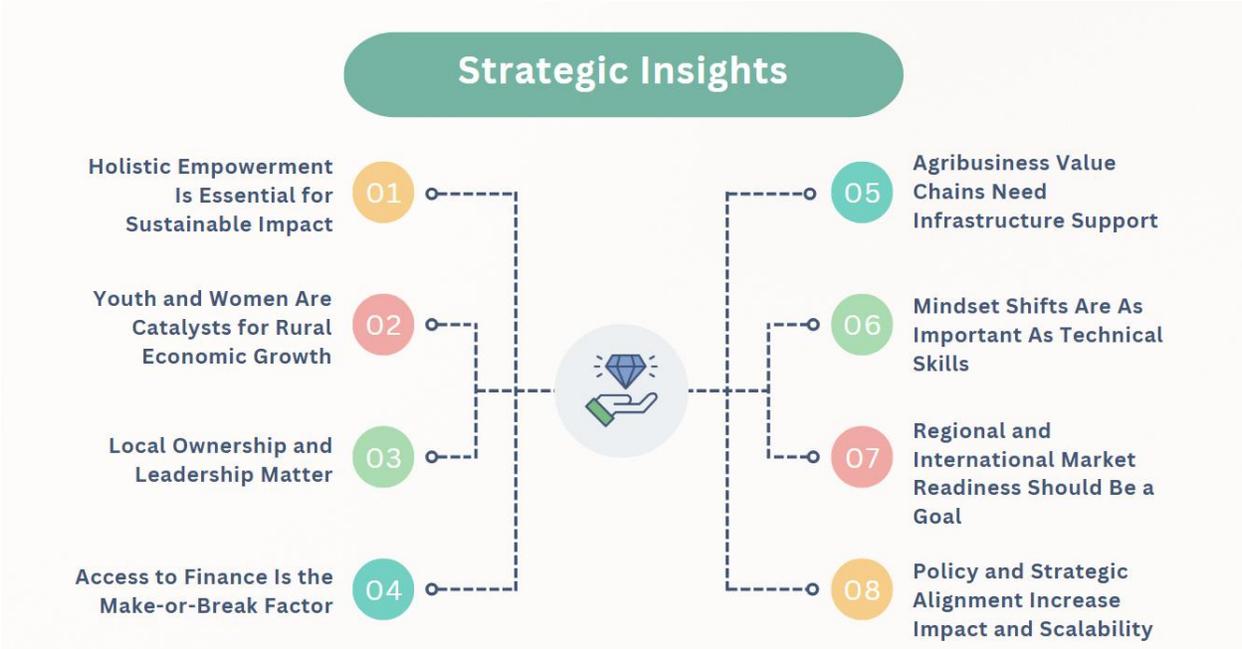
C.2. Challenges and Structural Barriers

Throughout the course of the project, several structural barriers became apparent. One of the most significant challenges identified was the limited access to finance for women and youth-led agribusinesses. Many participants struggled to secure the financing they needed to expand their operations or invest in necessary infrastructure. The lack of adequate packaging and transport

infrastructure also posed a significant barrier to market access, particularly for businesses in rural areas. Additionally, fragmented value chains in sectors like cassava and onions made it difficult for small-scale agribusinesses to reach larger, more structured markets.

These challenges underscored the need for continued efforts to improve access to finance, enhance infrastructure, and strengthen value chains in order to support the long-term growth and success of agribusinesses in Sierra Leone and the wider region.

Strategic Insights



D. Key Lessons Learned

Several key lessons emerged from the project that are critical for the sustainable development of the agricultural sector in Sierra Leone and similar contexts:

Empowering Youth and Women: Empowering youth within producer organizations and equipping women with practical business tools are essential for sustained economic transformation. This requires targeted training and mentorship programs that address the specific needs and challenges faced by these groups.

Intergenerational Leadership: Strengthening intergenerational leadership capacities is vital for fostering a culture of innovation and sustainability in agribusiness. Training young and emerging leaders to mentor others can create a ripple effect, ensuring the long-term success of the project's goals.

Integrated Support Models: The project's success is directly tied to its holistic approach, which integrates skills development with financial support, value chain integration, and market access. This approach has the potential to create a sustainable ecosystem where women and youth agripreneurs can thrive.

Sustainability and Scalability Recommendations

To ensure the sustainability and scalability of the project, several recommendations were made:

Ongoing Support for Grantees: Continued support for the six grant recipients, including advanced training and access to investment and trade financing, is necessary to help these businesses scale and compete regionally and globally.

Establishing an Entrepreneurship Financing Mechanism: Creating a dedicated financing mechanism for agripreneurs would provide the necessary resources to scale operations and address the financial barriers faced by small and medium-sized agribusinesses.

Investment in Agro-Processing Infrastructure: Facilitating investment in infrastructure, particularly in agro-processing, is essential for adding value to agricultural products and enhancing market access.

Policy and Regulatory Support: Policymakers should continue to support agribusiness development through favorable policies and frameworks that enhance access to finance, improve infrastructure, and promote market access for small-scale agribusinesses.

2) Burkina Faso

In August 2024, the Maison de l'Entreprise du Burkina Faso (MEBF), in partnership with the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA), and the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), launched the *Capacity Building for Women and Youth Empowerment in the Agricultural Sector* project in Burkina Faso. This project is part of a broader regional initiative covering Burkina Faso, Gabon, and Sierra Leone, aimed at empowering women and youth in agriculture.

Implemented over one year by the MEBF, the project focused on enhancing the participation of women- and youth-led cooperatives and MSMEs in value-added agricultural activities, improving access to financing, and strengthening their entrepreneurial and institutional capacities. Activities concentrated on the Hauts-Bassins and Centre regions and included launching the project, organizing awareness forums and workshops, conducting extensive Training of Trainers (ToT) programs, providing direct training to women and youth, and awarding innovation grants to selected beneficiaries. Despite some operational challenges, the project successfully completed most planned activities, achieving a completion rate of 90%.

Stakeholder Engagement and Pre-Launch Preparations

Before the official launch of the project, the Maison de l'Entreprise du Burkina Faso (MEBF) conducted extensive stakeholder consultations across Burkina Faso's agricultural sector, engaging government officials, agricultural cooperatives, youth groups, private sector actors, and technical and institutional partners. These consultations focused on the project's objectives and the specific needs of women and youth entrepreneurs in agriculture. Following this preparatory phase, local authorities, agricultural cooperatives, private sector representatives, and other stakeholders were actively involved in the project's implementation. Awareness workshops and forums served as key platforms for stakeholder mobilization and the identification of potential beneficiaries. During these events, eligibility criteria and application procedures were clearly communicated to ensure transparency and encourage broad participation.

The needs assessment involved over 100 MSMEs and cooperatives, identifying significant challenges such as:

- **Lack of access to finance** for expanding agricultural operations;
- **Limited technical knowledge**, particularly in value-added agriculture and business management;
- **Weak market linkages** for agricultural products.

The data collected informed the design of the training modules, mentorship programs, and the selection criteria for project beneficiaries.

- **National Level Engagement**

The project maintained strong engagement with national authorities and regional institutions through forums and information workshops. Partnerships with administrative bodies and sectoral organizations were strengthened, raising the visibility of women and youth in agricultural value chains and aligning project objectives with national agricultural development strategies.

- **Official Project Launch in Ouagadougou**

The official launch event took place on September 10, 2024, at MEBF's conference hall in Ouagadougou. The launch attracted key stakeholders from national and local government bodies, financial institutions, and women and youth organizations involved in agriculture.

The launch ceremony featured opening speeches from the Governor of the Centre Region, the Director-General of MEBF, and a representative from ACBF, who all emphasized the project's significance for inclusive growth and job creation in the agricultural sector.

During the ceremony, MEBF presented the project's approach, goals, and expected outcomes. The project aims to equip 250 women and youth-led agribusinesses in the Hauts Bassins and Centre regions with the tools and support to transition from subsistence to value-added agricultural activities.

- **Pre-Launch Meetings and Stakeholder Awareness**

Before the formal launch, pre-launch meetings were held in Ouagadougou and other key regions to introduce the project's objectives and gain stakeholder buy-in. These meetings were attended by representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Youth, and various local cooperatives.

Discussions focused on how the project could complement national agriculture policies, such as food security and youth employment. Participants expressed a commitment to supporting the project, particularly in terms of ensuring financial inclusion and improving market access for women and youth agripreneurs.

The visibility of the event was enhanced by media coverage from the National Television of Burkina (TNB) and private radio stations, ensuring broad awareness of the project across the country.



- **Training of Trainers (ToT) Program**

The first step in the capacity-building process was the implementation of a Training of Trainers (ToT) program. Through a competitive selection process, the Maison de l'Entreprise du Burkina Faso (MEBF) selected 25 trainers—11 women and 14 men—from the Hauts-Bassins and Centre regions, prioritizing candidates from women's and youth cooperatives with strong growth potential. The selected trainers received instruction in agricultural enterprise management using the SIYB ("Start and Improve Your Business") methodology. Following their training, these trainers conducted sessions that directly benefited 365 participants across Bobo-Dioulasso, Ouagadougou, Bama, and Tahghin-Dassouri.

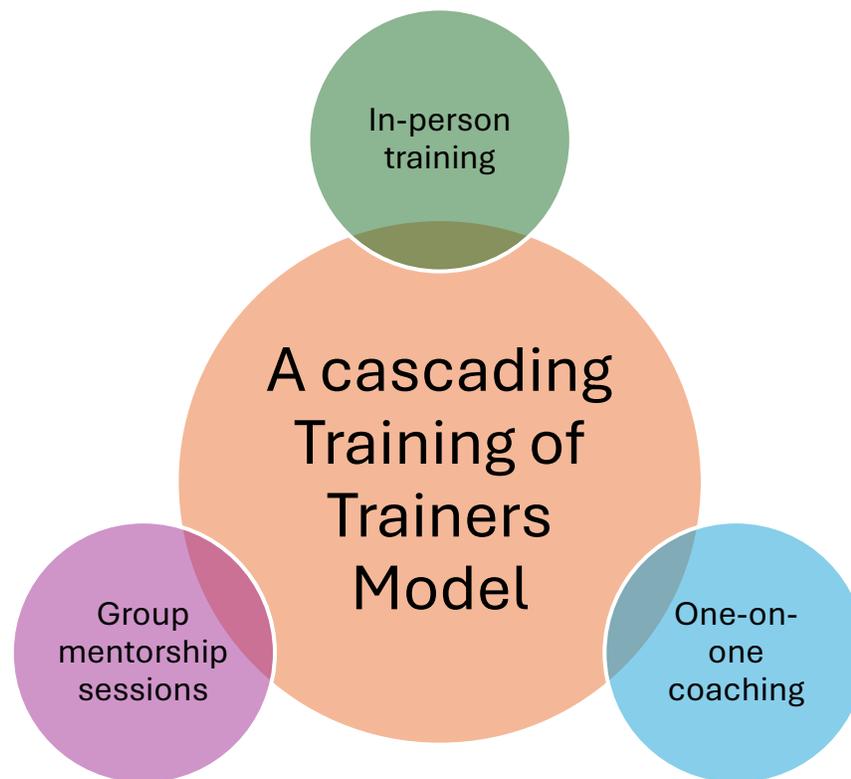
The ToT training focused on:

- **Agribusiness management and entrepreneurship;**
- **Value-added agricultural techniques.**
- **Coaching and leadership development.**

The trainers were equipped with the skills to cascade training to women and youth agribusinesses, helping them to overcome technical and management challenges. In addition, the trainers were encouraged to act as mentors and community leaders, helping to create a sustainable ecosystem for entrepreneurship.

- **Project Activities and Implementation Approach**

MEBF's implementation approach was based on three main components:



- **Component 1: Raise Awareness of Women and Youth in Agriculture**
This component focused on increasing awareness of the challenges women and youth face in agriculture. A virtual launch event connected stakeholders from all three countries, amplifying the voices of women and youth and raising awareness of the barriers they face in higher-level agricultural activities.
- **Component 2: Strengthen Producer Organizations and Agribusiness Associations**
This component aimed to enhance the capacities of women and youth producer organizations. It included the Training of Trainers, leadership coaching, and business development support. The project also focused on building institutional capacity to improve management practices, governance, and participation in policy dialogues.
- **Component 3: Scale-Up Agribusiness Development**
Focused on supporting agribusiness incubators and providing grant funding to selected organizations, this component aimed to build capacity in agribusiness support services. 6 producer organizations were selected for grant funding to help them scale up their activities, including purchasing equipment, obtaining certifications, and improving market access.
- **Monitoring and Coordination**
- Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms were put in place to ensure project objectives were being met. MEBF, in coordination with ACBF, conducted regular field

visits to monitor the progress of beneficiaries and provide real-time support. Feedback from trainers, participants, and stakeholders helped refine the training and mentorship models to ensure maximum impact.

- Regular project reviews were held to assess the effectiveness of the training programs and the financial support mechanisms. A strong emphasis was placed on impact tracking, particularly in terms of income generation and job creation for women and youth.
- **Early Results and Outcomes**
- The launch and initial activities in Burkina Faso led to several important outcomes:
- **Stakeholder Commitment:** Government, local authorities, and private sector actors have shown a strong commitment to supporting the project.
- **Training Success:** The ToT program was successfully completed, and the selected trainers are now prepared to deliver local capacity-building programs.
- **Increased Awareness:** Over 100 women and youth-led cooperatives were made aware of the project's goals and potential benefits.
- **Access to Finance:** Initial engagements with financial institutions have resulted in discussions about increasing financial access for women and youth agribusinesses.
- **Strategic Insights and Future Directions**

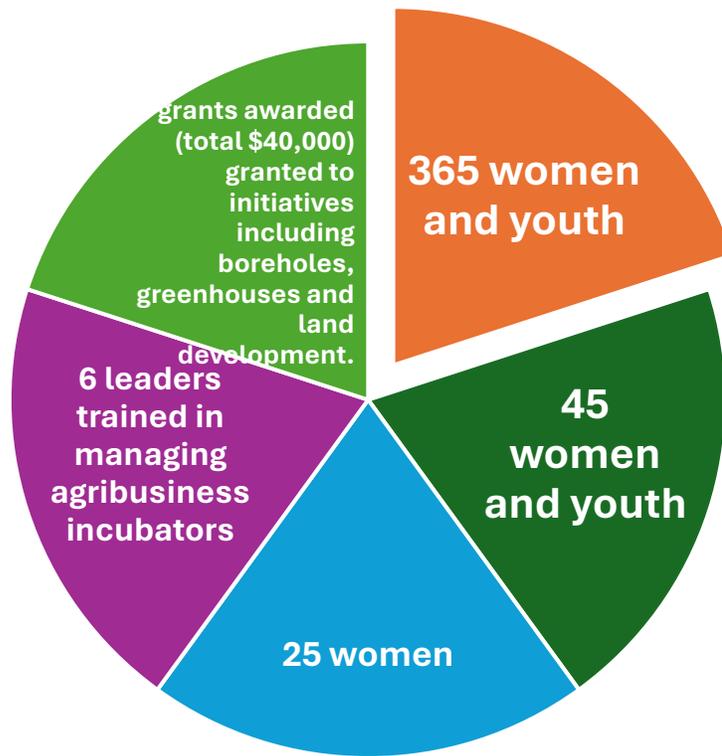
A. Preparation Phase

a. Stakeholder Engagement and Beneficiary Identification

Over **600 participants** engaged in awareness and training activities.

Testimonials highlighted significant improvements in business planning skills, leadership confidence, and agribusiness knowledge among women and youth.

In Bobo-Dioulasso, participants expressed a newfound ability to draft business plans and access local markets, while others reported forming new agricultural cooperatives to leverage collective power.





Project Implementation Report
ACBF Capacity Building Project for Women and Youth Entrepreneurs, Burkina Faso

No.	Activities	Target	Achievement				Observations
			2024		2025		
			Sept-Oct	Nov-Dec	Jan-Feb	Mar-Apr	
	Preparatory: signing of agreements with partners within the country, implementing partners, and disbursement of project funds						May 31, 2024
Component 1							
1.1	Project launch event	132 participants for the launch and 65 for the forum	X				
Component 2							
2.1	Training of Trainers	25 trainers			X		
2.2	Training in agribusiness management and entrepreneurship	365 women and youth				X	
2.3	Leadership training and coaching	45 women and youth				X	
2.4	Training of female coaches	25 women				X	
Component 3: Support to scale up agribusiness development							
3.1	Training for leaders and managers of agribusiness incubators	6 women and youth				X	
3.2	Exchange visit						To be organized in conjunction with the ACBF
3.3	Provide grant funding						To be organized in conjunction with the ACBF
	Cloture and reporting						

④

Prior to the official project launch, MEBF conducted extensive consultations with various stakeholders, including government officials, agricultural cooperatives, youth organizations, and private sector actors. These consultations aimed to ensure the project addressed the real needs of the agricultural sector. As a result, a needs assessment was carried out, which involved over 100 cooperatives and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). The assessment identified key challenges, such as limited access to finance, inadequate technical and management skills, and weak market connections, all of which were incorporated into the project’s design, training modules, and selection criteria for beneficiaries.

b. Official Launch and Objectives

The project was officially launched on September 10, 2024, at the MEBF conference hall in Ouagadougou. The event was attended by national and local authorities, financial institutions, women and youth groups, and received widespread media coverage. During the launch, the project’s goals and approach were presented, with a particular emphasis on supporting 250 women and youth-led agribusinesses in the Hauts-Bassins and Centre regions. The aim was to help these agribusinesses transition from subsistence farming to value-added agricultural activities, thereby increasing their productivity and market value.

The project is structured to address the key challenges identified during the needs assessment, focusing on empowering women and youth by providing them with the necessary tools, skills, and resources to thrive in the agricultural sector. It aims to raise awareness, provide training, facilitate access to finance, and foster entrepreneurial growth through targeted interventions.

B. Training and Capacity Building

i) Training of Trainers (ToT) Program

The project began with the implementation of a Training of [Trainers](#) (ToT) program. A total of 25 trainers from the targeted regions were selected based on their experience and capacity to teach agribusiness management, entrepreneurship, leadership, coaching, and value-added agricultural techniques. These trainers were equipped with the skills needed to cascade knowledge to the final beneficiaries, ensuring that the training would have a broad and lasting impact.

Following the ToT, a total of 365 women and youth participated in the training sessions. These participants gained valuable [skills](#) in business management, leadership, and business plan development, enabling them to better manage their agribusinesses and create sustainable growth. In addition, six leaders of professional organizations were trained to manage agribusiness incubators and nurseries, further strengthening the agricultural ecosystem in Burkina Faso.

To support the growth of the selected agribusinesses, five beneficiaries were awarded direct grants. These grants were intended to support investments in equipment, land improvements, boreholes, and greenhouses, all of which aimed to enhance the production capacities of these agribusinesses and facilitate their transition to value-added agricultural activities.

Key Activities and Areas of Focus

The project's implementation was built around three key areas of focus:

1. **Raising Awareness:** The project sought to raise awareness among women and youth about the opportunities and challenges in agriculture. This included promoting the benefits of transitioning from subsistence farming to value-added agricultural practices and highlighting the potential for agribusinesses to create economic opportunities.
2. [Strengthening Management Capacities:](#) A critical component of the project was to strengthen the management capacities of producer organizations and agribusiness associations. This included training in areas such as cooperative governance, leadership, financial management, and business development.
3. **Scaling Up Agribusiness Activities:** The project aimed to scale up the activities of selected agribusinesses through technical support and financial grants. By providing hands-on assistance and funding, the project hoped to help these businesses expand their operations and improve their market competitiveness.

4. [From the ground to the plate](#) : This training program aimed to strengthen farmers' skills in three key areas: product development, marketing, and logistics. First, producers learned how to better transform, sort, or package their products to increase their appeal in local markets. Next, comprehensive marketing training helped them master sales techniques, develop commercial strategies, identify new markets, and create or adapt their product offerings. This opened up new opportunities—selling to different buyers such as supermarkets or urban merchants, or diversifying their production, for example by growing tomatoes instead of cassava. Finally, improved logistics skills enabled them to better manage the distribution of local food products, including organizing group sales to fulfill larger orders, such as selling by truckload instead of small individual quantities. With these enhanced capabilities, farmers were better equipped to plan their activities, invest strategically, and ultimately increase their profitability.

In addition to these core activities, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms were put in place to track the progress of the project. Regular reviews were conducted, and the project was adjusted based on feedback from trainers, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness.

Early Results and Achievements

After seven months of implementation, the project had achieved a 90% execution rate, indicating strong progress towards its goals.

Some of the key early results include:

- **Stronger Commitment from Local Authorities:** There was a notable increase in local government commitment to supporting the project and its objectives. This support was essential for ensuring the project's success at the grassroots level.
- **Successful Capacity Building:** Trainers and entrepreneurs reported significant gains in their knowledge and skills. The training programs helped participants build greater confidence in managing their agribusinesses and applying new business practices.
- **Increased Awareness Among Women and Youth Cooperatives:** Through the project's outreach efforts, women and youth cooperatives in the targeted regions became more aware of the opportunities available to them and the support they could access through the project.
- **Initial Steps Toward Improved Access to Finance:** The project made important strides in improving access to finance. Discussions were initiated with financial institutions to explore opportunities for greater financial inclusion, though these discussions are ongoing.

Beneficiaries reported positive changes in their business practices, with many showcasing improved management skills, increased confidence, and the emergence of new entrepreneurial initiatives within their communities.

Challenges and Strategic Insights

Despite the early successes, the project also encountered several challenges. One of the key issues was the lack of a fully dedicated implementation team, which sometimes limited operational efficiency. In response, the project implemented digital management tools such as "projects.co" to improve planning and activity tracking, which helped mitigate some of these challenges.

Strategically, several insights emerged from the project's implementation:

1. **Inclusive and Participatory Approaches:** The project confirmed that an inclusive and participatory approach is essential for success. Engaging local communities and stakeholders from the outset helped ensure that the project was aligned with local needs and realities.
2. **Comprehensive Capacity Building:** Capacity building must extend beyond technical skills. The project emphasized the importance of leadership and mindset development, which are crucial for empowering women and youth to become successful entrepreneurs and leaders in the agricultural sector.
3. **Financial Inclusion:** Access to finance remains a significant barrier for women and youth in Burkina Faso's agricultural sector. The project's experience highlighted the need for stronger partnerships with banks and microfinance institutions to address this gap.
4. **Gender-Sensitive Approaches:** The project also underscored the importance of gender-sensitive approaches, particularly in addressing the unique challenges women face in accessing land, finance, and markets. These barriers need to be actively addressed to ensure that women can fully participate in the agricultural value chain.
5. **Mentorship and leadership development** were critical in transforming theoretical training into practical, ongoing business activities.
6. **Sector-specific incubator management training** opened pathways for future rural enterprise development.

Future Recommendations and Expansion Plans

Given the positive early results, the project is poised for future growth. Several key recommendations emerged from the initial phase of the project:

1. **National Expansion:** The project should be expanded nationwide across all thirteen regions of Burkina Faso. This would help ensure that women and youth in all parts of the country can benefit from the support and opportunities provided by the project.
2. **Strengthening Financial Linkages:** Future phases of the project should focus on further strengthening financial linkages between beneficiaries and financial institutions. This

could include the creation of dedicated funding mechanisms for women and youth agripreneurs.

3. **Integration into Existing Support Systems:** It is crucial to integrate beneficiaries into existing entrepreneurship support systems. This will help ensure that women and youth-led agribusinesses continue to receive ongoing support and resources as they grow.
4. **Investment in Infrastructure:** Additional investments in production, processing, and market infrastructure are essential to support the long-term sustainability of the agribusinesses created by the project. These investments will help improve market access, reduce transaction costs, and increase competitiveness.

The project has proven that with the right support, women and youth can become powerful drivers of agricultural transformation and rural economic development in Burkina Faso. With continued commitment and investment, the initiative has the potential to significantly improve the livelihoods of women and youth in the country's agricultural sector.

Implementation Strategy: Training of Trainers (ToT) and Capacity Building

The project began with the implementation of a Training of Trainers (ToT) program. A total of 25 trainers from the targeted regions were selected based on their experience and capacity to teach agribusiness management, entrepreneurship, leadership, coaching, and value-added agricultural techniques. These trainers were equipped with the skills needed to cascade knowledge to the final beneficiaries, ensuring that the training would have a broad and lasting impact.

Following the ToT, a total of 365 women and youth participated in the training sessions. These participants gained valuable skills in business management, leadership, and business plan development, enabling them to better manage their agribusinesses and create sustainable growth. In addition, six leaders of professional organizations were trained to manage agribusiness incubators and nurseries, further strengthening the agricultural ecosystem in Burkina Faso.

To support the growth of the selected agribusinesses, five beneficiaries were awarded direct grants. These grants were intended to support investments in equipment, land improvements, boreholes, and greenhouses, all of which aimed to enhance the production capacities of these agribusinesses and facilitate their transition to value-added agricultural activities.

Key Activities and Areas of Focus

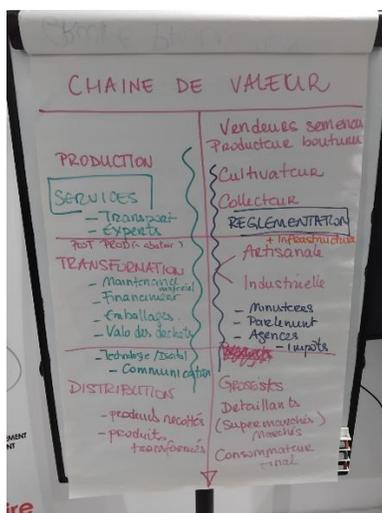
The project's implementation was built around three key areas of focus:

1. **Raising Awareness:** The project sought to raise awareness among women and youth about the opportunities and challenges in agriculture. This included promoting the benefits of transitioning from subsistence farming to value-added agricultural practices and highlighting the potential for agribusinesses to create economic opportunities.

2. **Strengthening Management Capacities:** A critical component of the project was to strengthen the management capacities of producer organizations and agribusiness associations. This included training in areas such as cooperative governance, leadership, financial management, and business development.
3. **Scaling Up Agribusiness Activities:** The project aimed to scale up the activities of selected agribusinesses through technical support and financial grants. By providing hands-on assistance and funding, the project hoped to help these businesses expand their operations and improve their market competitiveness.

In addition to these core activities, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms were put in place to track the progress of the project. Regular reviews were conducted, and the project was adjusted based on feedback from trainers, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness.





Early Results and Achievements

After seven months of implementation, the project had achieved a 90% execution rate, indicating strong progress towards its goals. Some of the key early results include:

- **Stronger Commitment from Local Authorities:** There was a notable increase in local government commitment to supporting the project and its objectives. This support was essential for ensuring the project's success at the grassroots level.
- **Successful Capacity Building:** Trainers and entrepreneurs reported significant gains in their knowledge and skills. The training programs helped participants build greater confidence in managing their agribusinesses and applying new business practices.
- **Increased Awareness Among Women and Youth Cooperatives:** Through the project's outreach efforts, women and youth cooperatives in the targeted regions became more aware of the opportunities available to them and the support they could access through the project.
- **Initial Steps Toward Improved Access to Finance:** The project made important strides in improving access to finance. Discussions were initiated with financial institutions to explore opportunities for greater financial inclusion, though these discussions are ongoing.

Beneficiaries reported positive changes in their business practices, with many showcasing improved management skills, increased confidence, and the emergence of new entrepreneurial initiatives within their communities.

Challenges and Strategic Insights

Despite the early successes, the project also encountered several challenges. One of the key issues was the lack of a fully dedicated implementation team, which sometimes limited operational efficiency. In response, the project implemented digital management tools such as "projects.co" to improve planning and activity tracking, which helped mitigate some of these challenges.

Strategically, several insights emerged from the project's implementation:

1. **Inclusive and Participatory Approaches:** The project confirmed that an inclusive and participatory approach is essential for success. Engaging local communities and stakeholders from the outset helped ensure that the project was aligned with local needs and realities.
2. **Comprehensive Capacity Building:** Capacity building must extend beyond technical skills. The project emphasized the importance of leadership and mindset development, which are crucial for empowering women and youth to become successful entrepreneurs and leaders in the agricultural sector.
3. **Financial Inclusion:** Access to finance remains a significant barrier for women and youth in Burkina Faso's agricultural sector. The project's experience highlighted the need for stronger partnerships with banks and microfinance institutions to address this gap.
4. **Gender-Sensitive Approaches:** The project also underscored the importance of gender-sensitive approaches, particularly in addressing the unique challenges women face in accessing land, finance, and markets. These barriers need to be actively addressed to ensure that women can fully participate in the agricultural value chain.

Future Recommendations and Expansion Plans

Given the positive early results, the project is poised for future growth. Several key recommendations emerged from the initial phase of the project:

- **National Expansion:** The project should be expanded nationwide across all thirteen regions of Burkina Faso. This would help ensure that women and youth in all parts of the country can benefit from the support and opportunities provided by the project.
- **Strengthening Financial Linkages:** Future phases of the project should focus on further strengthening financial linkages between beneficiaries and financial institutions. This could include the creation of dedicated funding mechanisms for women and youth agripreneurs.
- **Integration into Existing Support Systems:** It is crucial to integrate beneficiaries into existing entrepreneurship support systems. This will help ensure that women and youth-led agribusinesses continue to receive ongoing support and resources as they grow.
- **Investment in Infrastructure:** Additional investments in production, processing, and market infrastructure are essential to support the long-term sustainability of the agribusinesses created by the project. These investments will help improve market access, reduce transaction costs, and increase competitiveness.

The project has proven that with the right support, women and youth can become powerful drivers of agricultural transformation and rural economic development in Burkina Faso. With continued commitment and investment, the initiative has the potential to significantly improve the livelihoods of women and youth in the country's agricultural sector.

In August 2024, the Maison de l'Entreprise du Burkina Faso (MEBF), in partnership with the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA), and the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), officially launched a project aimed at empowering women and youth in the agricultural sector in Burkina Faso. This initiative is part of a larger regional program that spans Burkina Faso, Gabon, and Sierra Leone. The program's overarching goals include increasing the participation of women and youth in agricultural value chains, improving their access to finance, and strengthening their entrepreneurial and institutional capacities.

Prior to the official project launch, MEBF conducted extensive consultations with various stakeholders, including government officials, agricultural cooperatives, youth organizations, and private sector actors. These consultations aimed to ensure the project addressed the real needs of the agricultural sector. As a result, a needs assessment was carried out, which involved over 100 cooperatives and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). The assessment identified key challenges, such as limited access to finance, inadequate technical and management skills, and weak market connections, all of which were incorporated into the project's design, training modules, and selection criteria for beneficiaries.

Official Launch and Objectives

The project was officially launched on September 10, 2024, at the MEBF conference hall in Ouagadougou. The event was attended by national and local authorities, financial institutions, women and youth groups, and received widespread media coverage. During the launch, the project's goals and approach were presented, with a particular emphasis on supporting 250 women and youth-led agribusinesses in the Hauts-Bassins and Centre regions. The aim was to help these agribusinesses transition from subsistence farming to value-added agricultural activities, thereby increasing their productivity and market value.

The project is structured to address the key challenges identified during the needs assessment, focusing on empowering women and youth by providing them with the necessary tools, skills, and resources to thrive in the agricultural sector. It aims to raise awareness, provide training, facilitate access to finance, and foster entrepreneurial growth through targeted interventions.

Implementation Strategy: Training of Trainers (ToT) and Capacity Building

The project began with the implementation of a Training of Trainers (ToT) program. A total of 25 trainers from the targeted regions were selected based on their experience and capacity to teach agribusiness management, entrepreneurship, leadership, coaching, and value-added agricultural techniques. These trainers were equipped with the skills needed to cascade knowledge to the final beneficiaries, ensuring that the training would have a broad and lasting impact.

4. **Raising Awareness:** The project sought to raise awareness among women and youth about the opportunities and challenges in agriculture. This included promoting the benefits of transitioning from subsistence farming to value-added agricultural practices and highlighting the potential for agribusinesses to create economic opportunities.
5. **Strengthening Management Capacities:** A critical component of the project was to strengthen the management capacities of producer organizations and agribusiness associations. This included training in areas such as cooperative governance, leadership, financial management, and business development.
6. **Scaling Up Agribusiness Activities:** The project aimed to scale up the activities of selected agribusinesses through technical support and financial grants. By providing hands-on assistance and funding, the project hoped to help these businesses expand their operations and improve their market competitiveness.

In addition to these core activities, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms were put in place to track the progress of the project. Regular reviews were conducted, and the project was adjusted based on feedback from trainers, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness.

Component	Activities	Beneficiaries	Targets
Strengthen the capacities of producer organizations and agro-industrial associations	Training of trainers	Trainers	25
	Training in agro-food management and entrepreneurship	Cooperative organizations (MSMEs, SMEs) and individual women and youth promoters	150
	Training and coaching in leadership	Cooperative organizations (MSMEs, SMEs) and individual women and youth promoters	45
	Training of female coaches	Women entrepreneurs in agribusiness	25

Support for the intensification of agro-industry development	Training of managers and administrators of agro-food incubators	Incubators	10
	Exchange visit	Women entrepreneurs in agribusiness	2
	Provision of grants	Cooperative organizations (MSMEs, SMEs) and individual women and youth promoters	8

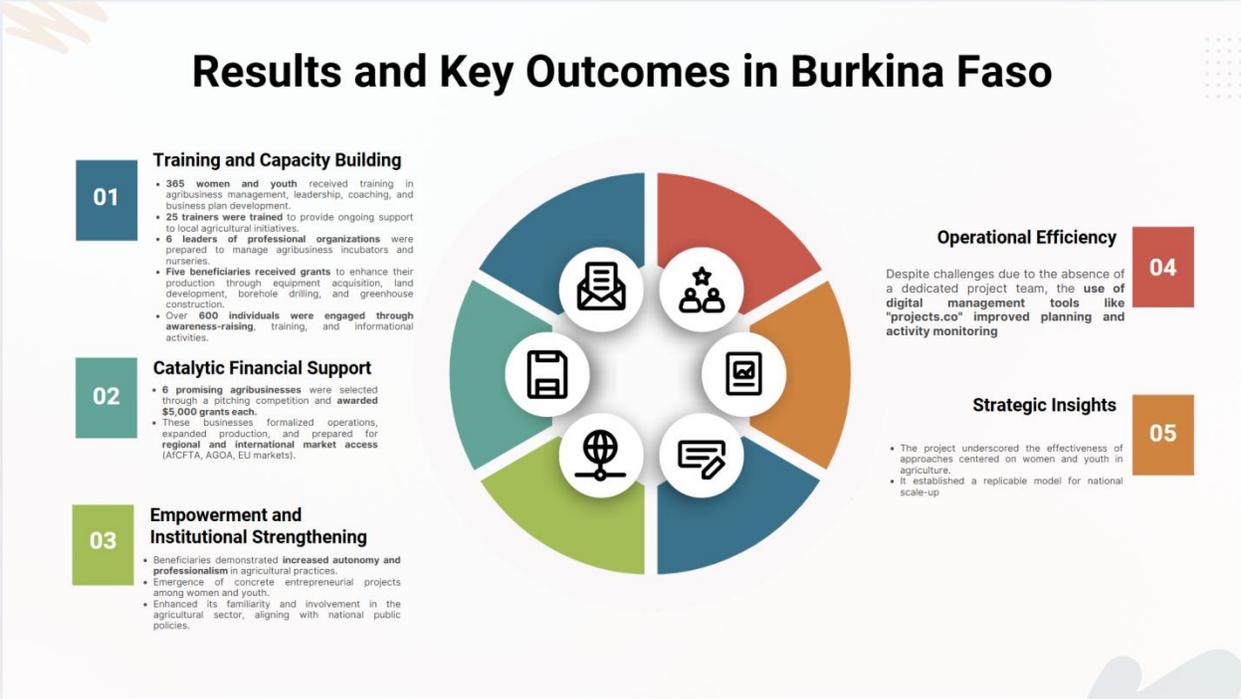
Early Results and Achievements

Component	Activities	Bénéficiaires	Cibles	Résultats
Strengthen the capacities of producer organizations and agro-industrial associations	Training of trainers	Identified trainers to support agribusiness entrepreneurs	25	30 trainers identified and trained
	Training in agro-food management and entrepreneurship	entrepreneurship Cooperative organizations (MSMEs, SMEs) and individual women and youth promoters	150	254 agricultural organizations and agribusiness entrepreneurs trained

	Training and coaching in leadership	Cooperative organizations (MSMEs, SMEs) and individual women and youth promoters	45	47 agricultural organizations and agribusiness entrepreneurs trained, including 32 women
	Training of female coaches	Women entrepreneurs in agribusiness	25	32 women benefited from group coaching training
Support for the intensification of agro-industry development	Training of managers and administrators of agro-food incubators	Incubators	10	11 managers and administrators of incubators trained
	Exchange visit	Women entrepreneurs in agribusiness	2	Instead of sending two beneficiaries abroad, two international experts in cassava and banana were brought to Gabon and conducted training sessions for 46 participants over two days

	Provision of grant	Organisations coopératives (MPME, PME) et promoteurs individuels de femmes et de jeunes	8	Des subventions de 6,660 USD chacune ont été approuvées pour 3 entreprises et coopératives agricoles
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• **Results and Key Outcomes**



After seven months of implementation, the project had achieved a 90% execution rate, indicating strong progress towards its goals. Some of the key early results include:

- **Stronger Commitment from Local Authorities:** There was a notable increase in local government commitment to supporting the project and its objectives. This support was essential for ensuring the project’s success at the grassroots level.
- **Successful Capacity Building:** Trainers and entrepreneurs reported significant gains in their knowledge and skills. The training programs helped participants build greater confidence in managing their agribusinesses and applying new business practices.

- **Increased Awareness Among Women and Youth Cooperatives:** Through the project’s outreach efforts, women and youth cooperatives in the targeted regions became more aware of the opportunities available to them and the support they could access through the project.
- **Initial Steps Toward Improved Access to Finance:** The project made important strides in improving access to finance. Discussions were initiated with financial institutions to explore opportunities for greater financial inclusion, though these discussions are ongoing.

Beneficiaries reported positive changes in their business practices, with many showcasing improved management skills, increased confidence, and the emergence of new entrepreneurial initiatives within their communities.

Challenges and Strategic Insights

Despite the early successes, the project also encountered several challenges. One of the key issues was the lack of a fully dedicated implementation team, which sometimes limited operational efficiency. In response, the project implemented digital management tools such as "projects.co" to improve planning and activity tracking, which helped mitigate some of these challenges.

- **Strategic Insights**



Strategically, several insights emerged from the project’s implementation:

5. **Inclusive and Participatory Approaches:** The project confirmed that an inclusive and participatory approach is essential for success. Engaging local communities and stakeholders from the outset helped ensure that the project was aligned with local needs and realities.
6. **Comprehensive Capacity Building:** Capacity building must extend beyond technical skills. The project emphasized the importance of leadership and mindset development, which are crucial for empowering women and youth to become successful entrepreneurs and leaders in the agricultural sector.
7. **Financial Inclusion:** Access to finance remains a significant barrier for women and youth in Burkina Faso's agricultural sector. The project's experience highlighted the need for stronger partnerships with banks and microfinance institutions to address this gap.
8. **Gender-Sensitive Approaches:** The project also underscored the importance of gender-sensitive approaches, particularly in addressing the unique challenges women face in accessing land, finance, and markets. These barriers need to be actively addressed to ensure that women can fully participate in the agricultural value chain.

Given the positive early results, the project is poised for future growth. Several key recommendations emerged from the initial phase of the project:

1. **National Expansion:** The project should be expanded nationwide across all thirteen regions of Burkina Faso. This would help ensure that women and youth in all parts of the country can benefit from the support and opportunities provided by the project.
2. **Strengthening Financial Linkages:** Future phases of the project should focus on further strengthening financial linkages between beneficiaries and financial institutions. This could include the creation of dedicated funding mechanisms for women and youth agribusinesses.
3. **Integration into Existing Support Systems:** It is crucial to integrate beneficiaries into existing entrepreneurship support systems. This will help ensure that women and youth-led agribusinesses continue to receive ongoing support and resources as they grow.
4. **Investment in Infrastructure:** Additional investments in production, processing, and market infrastructure are essential to support the long-term sustainability of the agribusinesses created by the project. These investments will help improve market access, reduce transaction costs, and increase competitiveness.

The project has proven that with the right support, women and youth can become powerful drivers of agricultural transformation and rural economic development in Burkina Faso. With continued commitment and investment, the initiative has the potential to significantly improve the livelihoods of women and youth in the country's agricultural sector.

3) Project implementation in Gabon

On October 18, 2024, Gabon officially launched the national component of the "Capacity Building for Women and Youth Empowerment in the Agricultural Sector" project, held at Libreville Business Square. The event, organized by ACT Afrique Gabon in collaboration with Ellipsis, was attended by 83 participants, including key government officials, representatives from the private sector, development agencies, and leaders of women's and youth cooperatives. This launch marked Gabon's entry into a broader, multi-country initiative led by the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), with additional support from the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA) and the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), alongside Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone.

In Gabon, the project operates under the culturally meaningful name "Butamb," which translates to "soil" in the Punu language. This name reflects the deep connection between the program and local agricultural traditions and realities, creating a sense of local ownership and relevance. Focused on the fertile Libreville–Tchibanga corridor, the project targets long-standing challenges within Gabon's agricultural sector, particularly addressing the underrepresentation of women and youth due to barriers such as limited access to finance, inadequate technical skills, and the absence of formal cooperative structures.

The Butamb initiative seeks to transform these challenges by providing women and youth-led cooperatives with the necessary tools and support to succeed. The project's core activities include training, coaching, financing, and institutional strengthening to enhance the capacity of these groups. With a timeline from October 2024 to May 2025, the project aims to identify key beneficiaries, implement a Training of Trainers (ToT) model, offer mentorship, and distribute small grants to support agribusiness development. Through these activities, Butamb intends to create sustainable change in Gabon's agricultural sector, ensuring a more inclusive and resilient ecosystem.

The Launch Event and Its Significance

The launch event held on October 18, 2024, at Libreville Business Square was a landmark moment for Gabon's agricultural sector. The project's name, "Butamb," resonated strongly with local communities, particularly as it emphasizes the connection to the soil and agricultural practices. The presence of key stakeholders, including government agencies, private sector partners, and development organizations, was a clear indication of the broad support and recognition the project received.

One of the key highlights of the launch was the announcement by the National Agency for the Promotion of Investments (ANPI) that the cost to register a cooperative would be reduced to 50,000 FCFA (about \$85 USD). This decision addressed a significant barrier to the formalization of cooperatives, making it easier for smallholder farmers and agribusinesses to access formal financial systems and support.

During the event, participants engaged in a series of discussions that highlighted the structural challenges faced by smallholder farmers, especially in terms of limited access to capital, small-scale operations, and the geographic dispersion of communities. A broad consensus emerged that solutions to these challenges should focus on improving productivity through better agricultural

practices, providing access to quality inputs, improving product standards to ensure competitiveness, and ensuring regular supply to meet market demands. These discussions also reflected the urgency and importance of addressing these issues to create long-term, sustainable growth in Gabon's agricultural sector.

Project Objectives and Structure

The Butamb project is designed to have a transformative impact on Gabon's agricultural sector by focusing on women and youth-led cooperatives. The project's objectives are to:

1. **Generate Localized Data:** Collect and analyze data to guide future interventions and better understand the needs of the target groups.
2. **Strengthen Human and Organizational Capacities:** Enhance the skills and capacities of cooperatives to enable them to function effectively and grow.
3. **Improve Access to Finance and Business Development Services:** Facilitate access to financial resources and business services to help women and youth-led cooperatives thrive.
4. **Encourage Sustainable Agricultural Practices:** Promote sustainable agricultural techniques and business practices that can lead to long-term growth and environmental stewardship.

The implementation of the project follows a structured approach based on four key activities:

1. **Raising Awareness:** This includes public events and conducting value chain assessments to identify key opportunities and challenges.
2. **Training and Capacity Building:** The project aims to train 254 women and youth in key areas such as business management, cooperative governance, marketing, and sustainable agricultural practices.
3. **Direct Support to Agro-Industry:** The project strengthens 11 agribusiness incubators and awards grants to three promising projects, helping them scale and formalize their operations.
4. **Building Partnerships:** The project also focuses on building partnerships with national and international stakeholders to ensure long-term impact and sustainability.

Through this structured approach, Butamb has already started to yield significant early results, with strong local ownership, a new generation of trained agripreneurs, and initial policy impacts such as the reduced cost of cooperative registration. These results demonstrate the potential for systemic change and the positive impact the project is having on the agricultural sector.

Training and Capacity Building Activities

One of the central components of the Butamb project is its Training of Trainers (ToT) model. The ToT model is designed to empower local cooperative leaders, especially women, with the skills

necessary to cascade knowledge to their communities and cooperatives. The ToT program was enthusiastically received at the launch event, with participants recognizing the importance of this model in creating a sustainable, bottom-up approach to agricultural development.

The project's first training sessions have already begun, with 254 women and youth trained in a range of essential skills, including business management, cooperative governance, marketing, and sustainable farming practices. These training sessions are designed to equip participants with the knowledge needed to run successful agribusinesses, build strong cooperatives, and improve their competitiveness in local and international markets.

In addition to the ToT model, the project is also providing direct mentorship and leadership coaching. A total of 45 beneficiaries have been trained in leadership skills, including self-leadership, strategic planning, and organizational growth. Furthermore, 25 women have been trained specifically as coaches, which is intended to create a network of empowered female leaders who can support the next generation of agripreneurs.

Direct Support to Agribusiness Incubators and Grant Funding

To support the scaling of agribusinesses, the Butamb project has focused on strengthening 11 agribusiness incubators. These incubators provide essential services to youth- and women-led businesses, helping them grow and become more competitive. The training provided to the incubator leaders ensures that they are better equipped to support these enterprises, providing a critical link between small-scale agribusinesses and larger markets.

Additionally, the project has distributed small grants to three outstanding agribusinesses. These grants are intended to help these businesses scale their operations, invest in new technologies, and formalize their operations. The funding is being used to address key barriers to growth, such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to finance, and the need for professionalization.

Challenges and Structural Barriers

While the Butamb project has made strong early progress, several challenges remain. One of the main issues identified is the need for expanded technical training, especially in areas such as agro-processing, value-added products, and market access. Many participants in the project face challenges in improving the quality of their products to meet market demands and increasing the productivity of their operations.

Another challenge is the professionalization of cooperatives. While the Butamb project has made strides in reducing the cost of cooperative registration, there remains a need to improve the governance and operational structures of these cooperatives to ensure that they can function effectively and grow. Many cooperatives are still struggling with limited capacity in terms of leadership, financial management, and business development.

Furthermore, access to finance remains a significant barrier. While the reduction in the cost of cooperative registration is a step in the right direction, more needs to be done to ensure that women and youth-led agribusinesses can access the financial resources they need to grow. This includes

improving access to microfinance, credit, and investment opportunities tailored to the specific needs of smallholder farmers and agribusinesses.

Finally, logistics remains a critical challenge for smallholder farmers and agribusinesses in Gabon. The geographic dispersion of communities, combined with inadequate transport and storage infrastructure, makes it difficult for agribusinesses to reach larger markets and maintain consistent product quality.

Early Results and Successes

Despite the challenges, the Butamb project has already begun to yield positive results. Local ownership has been strong, with many communities embracing the project and taking active roles in its implementation. The first generation of trained agripreneurs has emerged, with many already implementing new business practices and improving the sustainability of their operations.

The reduction in the cost of cooperative registration by the National Agency for the Promotion of Investments (ANPI) has been a key success, addressing a major barrier to cooperative formalization and enhancing access to financing. Additionally, the formation of new partnerships with national and international stakeholders has strengthened the project's foundation and ensured that it will have a lasting impact on Gabon's agricultural sector.

Looking Ahead: Future Phases of the Butamb Project

The success of the initial phase of the Butamb project has paved the way for a promising second phase, which will focus on expanding access to finance, advancing technical training, strengthening the value of local agricultural products, and consolidating institutional support. The second phase of the project will also aim to increase the scalability of agribusinesses by improving access to export markets, thereby contributing to broader regional integration.

The Butamb project represents a transformative step toward creating a more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient agricultural sector in Gabon. By empowering women and youth, strengthening cooperatives, and facilitating access to finance and technical training, Butamb is planting the seeds for long-term economic growth and social development in Gabon.

- **Results and Key Outcomes**

Results and Key Outcomes in Sierra Leone

01

Strengthened Capacities

254 women and youth were trained in agricultural business management, cooperative governance, marketing, and sustainable practices.

30 local trainers, including many women, were trained to cascade their knowledge to wider communities, ensuring sustainability

11 incubators were reinforced to better assist agricultural entrepreneurs with technical and business support.

3 high-potential agribusiness projects received direct grants (up to 3 million FCFA each) to expand production capacities

02

Formalization of cooperatives

The registration cost for cooperatives was reduced to 50,000 FCFA, making it easier for smallholders to access financial services and formal markets.



Strategic partnerships

Strong collaborations were created with national agencies, private actors, and international institutions to sustain agricultural entrepreneurship.

Creation of an online platform allowing beneficiaries to conduct trades among themselves

04

Knowledge capitalized

Lessons learned were documented, highlighting the need for continuous technical training, better access to finance, and stronger cooperative governance.

06

• Strategic Insights

Strategic Insights

01 Rooting the project in local culture (with the name "Butamb" and community-led activities) built stronger commitment and relevance among beneficiaries.

02 Training of Trainers (ToT) models, combined with coaching and hands-on workshops, created a multiplier effect that extends beyond the initial beneficiaries.

04 Engaging both public and private sector partners, as well as financial institutions, increased the project's reach and sustainability, making it more than just a one-off intervention.



05 Addressing smallholder productivity, product quality, and market linkages is essential for competitiveness and must be tackled simultaneously.

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PHASE III Project Outcomes

- 1) Report per country
 - Milestones and achievements Key targets set at the beginning of the project.
 - Progress is made towards these targets.
 - Accomplishment in skills training, entrepreneurship development, and coaching.

2) *Training and Capacity Building Initiatives*

Overview of Training Programs:

The project implemented an extensive **Training of Trainers (ToT)** model, with local leaders and facilitators gaining expertise to pass on skills to wider groups of women and youth. Training programs covered key areas such as business management, cooperative governance, financial management, and sustainable farming techniques.

Curriculum and Training Modules:

The curriculum was designed based on the unique needs of the agricultural sector in each country. Training modules included:

- **Agribusiness Management:** Principles of managing a business, budgeting, and financial forecasting.
- **Cooperative Governance:** Skills for leading cooperatives, team building, and enhancing collective decision-making.
- **Sustainable Agricultural Practices:** Techniques for value-added agriculture and environmentally sustainable practices.
- **Leadership and Entrepreneurial Development:** Leadership skills, strategic planning, and creating a vision for scaling businesses.

Number of Participants Trained and Key Skills Imparted:

- Over **600 women and youth** across the three countries participated in the training programs.
- Key skills imparted included:
 - **Financial Management:** Budgeting, savings, and financial planning.
 - **Leadership:** How to lead teams and manage business operations effectively.
 - **Agribusiness Development:** Knowledge of sustainable farming and market expansion strategies.

3) *Coaching and Mentorship Approach*

Role of Coaching and Mentorship:

Coaching and mentorship have been central to ensuring that the project's beneficiaries receive continuous support beyond the training phase. This personalized approach has empowered women and youth with practical advice and guidance, helping them navigate the challenges of entrepreneurship and agribusiness management.

Strategies for Ongoing Support:

- **One-on-One Mentoring:** Beneficiaries were paired with experienced coaches and mentors who guided them through business planning, scaling operations, and addressing sector-specific challenges.
- **Group Coaching Sessions:** Group-based sessions encouraged peer learning and sharing of experiences among agripreneurs.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Regular engagements with local and regional business leaders provided access to new opportunities, resources, and markets.

Success Stories from Beneficiaries:

- **Burkina Faso:** Several agribusinesses transitioned from subsistence farming to value-added agricultural businesses, increasing both productivity and profitability.
- **Gabon:** A female-led cooperative successfully scaled up its operations after receiving mentorship in agro-processing techniques, increasing both its market reach and financial viability.

4) Public communications and outreach

Awareness Campaigns and Engagement with Stakeholders:

The project's outreach efforts focused on raising awareness about the opportunities available to women and youth in agriculture. Information dissemination was carried out through workshops, public events, and stakeholder meetings. Efforts were aimed at ensuring that local communities, government bodies, and private sector actors understood the project's objectives and could actively engage.

Media Coverage, Reports, and Advocacy Efforts:

- The **launch events** in each country garnered significant media coverage, ensuring that the project received widespread attention. Reports and press releases emphasized the success stories of local agripreneurs and the broader economic impact of the initiative.
- The advocacy efforts included high-level discussions with government stakeholders to ensure policy support and to address systemic barriers in the agricultural sector.

Use of Digital Platforms and Community Engagement:

- Social media campaigns and online platforms were used to engage a wider audience, while **community radio programs** and local outreach initiatives kept stakeholders informed in remote areas.
- A dedicated website was launched to track project progress, share success stories, and provide resources for beneficiaries.

5) Challenges in Implementation

Key Obstacles Encountered:

Several challenges emerged during project implementation across all three countries:

- **Limited Access to Finance:** Despite efforts to engage financial institutions, access to financing for women and youth-led agribusinesses remained a significant barrier.
- **Weak Infrastructure:** In remote regions, inadequate transport and storage facilities limited access to larger markets.
- **Cooperative Governance:** Weak governance structures in many cooperatives hindered their operational efficiency and growth.

Contextual and Operational Difficulties:

- **Burkina Faso:** Operational efficiency was at times affected by the absence of a fully dedicated implementation team.
- **Gabon:** Logistic challenges and the geographic dispersion of communities made it harder to provide consistent training and mentorship.
- **Sierra Leone:** Political instability and unpredictable weather patterns posed risks to the agricultural activities of beneficiaries.

Strategies Adopted to Mitigate Challenges:

- The use of **digital management tools** like "projects.co" helped mitigate organizational challenges, especially in planning and tracking activities.
- **Partnerships with local financial institutions** were strengthened to ease access to finance.
- **Decentralized outreach** and **mobile training units** were employed to overcome geographical barriers.