

# EMPOWERING WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE ENSURES BALANCE



Echoing many publications released in March to commemorate International Women's Day, I wish to express my unconditional support and surely that of the many men who work in our male-dominated sector for awareness of the fundamental role played by women in any economic sector.

Particularly in many tobacco-growing countries, women work side by side with their spouses and accompany them to tobacco auctions, many times along with their small children, to ensure that any money obtained returns home.

This is because there are cases, such as Zimbabwe, where, as a small display of capitalism, a whole business structure grows around auction floors during the marketing season to offer growers (men) with fresh cash in their pockets an easy, accessible and fast way to spend the proceeds from their tobacco sales. Last year, while visiting these auction floors, growers' wives told us how much they had suffered in past years when their husbands had spent everything even before exiting the auction floor, as these business structures showcase all kinds of goods that are never again to be found together in a single place. Not only have we witnessed this situation but also how the women hold the receipt showing the price to be paid by the buyer for the tobacco leaf tightly against their bodies.

Women ensure family stability. In the Dominican Republic, women

account for 60% of the total labor force in the tobacco sector and they are highly qualified to perform every single task involved in the value chain, from planting to the operation of machinery, and in many cases they are in charge of and manage family businesses and traditional companies engaged in cigar and cigarette manufacturing.

According to a study on women in tobacco growing in China, Kenya, and Tanzania, they devote 30 to 50% of their time to tobacco growing, while their spouses only devote 30% of their time to this task. During the growing season, women work an average of 16 hours a day in the fields.

On average, women work 6 to 8 hours daily in their farms, while their spouses put in only 4 hours approximately. The only area where men outrank women is salaries, as men receive \$3 more than women in daily wages (women get \$8 per day, while men get \$11 per day, on average). With a simple equation, we arrive at the conclusion that women devote at least as much time as their spouses to tobacco growing, although women still need to devote additional time, quite a number of hours, to child care and domestic chores. And, for women, a day still has only 24 hours...

It is also important to highlight the significant role women play in managing their household income. In the case of China, for example, almost 55% of men in the tobacco sector execute the

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contracts with buyer companies and have access to bank accounts, and, lastly, they are also in charge of receiving the money. However, according to data in this study, most of the decisions related to the tobacco business and finances are made by women.

In general, women account for



43% of the global labor force in agriculture in underdeveloped countries and for almost 50% in sub-Saharan Africa (according to FAO data) but, asked about their responsibilities, women consider their household chores and child care as their main tasks, resulting in an underestimation of the time they actually devote to working in the fields.

Giving women financial freedom with some degree of stability could improve the standard of living in their households, communities, regions, and countries,

considering their broad business skills. Women will make any effort to achieve results and thus will consolidate opportunities for their children in an equal-basis future.

In past decades, we have gathered strong evidence about the positive impact that gender diversity has on global economic growth and development. Data overwhelmingly show that companies with strong female leadership achieve returns 35.4% higher than those lacking this profile. Many other data exist that prove the efficiency of measures designed to promote female inclusion in the different sectors.

From here, from this mostly male-dominated sector, we will do all efforts to promote and share the significant role played by women around us.

ITGA for gender equality in the tobacco sector



António. Abrunhosa  
ITGA CEO