



GEAVET DIGI-BASED COACHING MODULE FOR WOMEN IN SUSTAINABLE AGRI-BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

DELIVERABLE 4.2

GEAVET PROJECT N° IO1129027

“INCLUSIVE GREENING EXCELLENCE IN THE AFRICAN EDUCATION AND TRAINING ECOSYSTEM”



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2.3 Leadership and Participation in Agri-Value Chains

2.3:1 Building Leadership in Agriculture

Leadership in agriculture is multidimensional and extends beyond farm management. It integrates scientific expertise, mentorship, gender inclusion, technological literacy, community engagement, and personal empowerment.

Evidence shows that strengthening women’s leadership improves productivity, institutional governance, and food security outcomes.

Scientific Expertise as a Foundation for Leadership

Scientific knowledge is the foundation of effective agricultural leadership. Leaders who understand agronomy, soil science, climate resilience, and environmental management are better able to make informed, evidence-based decisions.

For example, [Taylor Dunivin](#), demonstrates how advanced research training strengthens science-policy leadership. Recognized as the 2020 ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Congressional Science Fellow, exemplifies how scientific training—in her case, a Ph.D. in Microbiology and Environmental Toxicology from Michigan State University with a focus on arsenic and antibiotic resistance in soil microbiomes—forms the bedrock of effective agricultural leadership. This scientific grounding is not merely academic; it translates directly into practical leadership capacity. As noted in the profiles of ASA Fellows, leaders such as those recognized for expertise in nutrient management have authored dozens peer-reviewed publications and have presented at thousands of scientific and industry meetings, demonstrating how scientific productivity underpins leadership influence. The ability to generate, synthesize, and communicate scientific knowledge is thus a prerequisite for agricultural leadership at the highest levels.

Scientific productivity (peer-reviewed publications, conference leadership, interdisciplinary research) enhances authority and influence within value chains and policy spaces.

Leadership as Mentorship and Human Capital Development

Effective leadership in agriculture prioritizes mentorship and institutional strengthening. Agricultural leaders invest in the development of the next generation, providing personalized mentoring, creating inclusive networks, and fostering the growth of students, early-career scientists, and community members. Research on human capital in horticultural agribusiness institutions identifies leadership as one of five key parameters—alongside individual capability, individual motivation, organizational climate, and workgroup effectiveness—that determine the quality and effectiveness of agricultural institutions.

At the academic and professional level, mentorship is equally central. Award citations consistently highlight the mentoring of graduate students and postdoctoral researchers as a hallmark of distinguished agricultural leadership. An example of mentorship-driven leadership is Laura C. Bowling, recognized in the 2021/2022 ACSESS Awards, who has

advised, mentored, instructed, and supervised hundreds of women pursuing careers in agronomy, crops, soils, and environmental sciences.

Mentorship strengthens confidence, leadership continuity, and professional networks.

Gender and Diversity in Agricultural Leadership

Despite progress, women remain underrepresented in senior agricultural leadership roles. An important initiative addressing this gap is [Women In Soil Ecology](#), co-founded by A. Peyton Smith, which supports women and gender minorities in soil science.

In U.K., Rebekah Shields and Claire Morgan are prominent figures in the agricultural recruitment sector and advocate for greater gender and diversity representation in agricultural leadership. They co-lead [Agricultural Recruitment Specialists](#), a recruitment firm focused on the agriculture, food, farming, and animal health industries. Both serve as Global Recruitment Directors, overseeing international headhunting and leadership placement. Through their work, they promote inclusive hiring practices and actively support the advancement of women in British agriculture, challenging traditional gender imbalances within the sector.

Innovation and Technological Literacy

Digital literacy and innovation are increasingly critical for agricultural leadership. In modern agriculture, leaders drive transformation by serving as the vital link between traditional science and the fast-evolving digital economy. Their role involves the following key pillars:

- **Technological Literacy:** This encompasses the ability to effectively use, manage, and critically evaluate digital tools like AI, IoT, and remote sensing. It is the foundation for making data-driven decisions that improve farm efficiency and productivity.
- **Championing Innovation:** Leaders advocate for the adoption of smart farming (Agriculture 4.0), including precision irrigation, drones, and autonomous robotics, to stay competitive in a global market.
- **Driving Sustainability:** A core focus is implementing "green" practices—such as low-carbon technologies, water-saving irrigation, and soil carbon management—to meet environmental targets and ensure long-term food security.
- **Overcoming Resistance:** Leaders manage the organizational and cultural change associated with digital transformation by addressing generational gaps, providing technical training, and fostering a culture of adaptability.
- **Building Strategic Bridges:** They facilitate partnerships between agricultural scientists, tech developers, and policymakers to create Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and inclusive ecosystems that empower small-scale and youth-led ventures

Watch the video on the role of leadership in advancing digital agriculture:

<https://youtu.be/eq5DqGey-Ek>

Reflect on the challenges you may face as a leader in digital agriculture in your country.

Community Engagement

Agricultural leaders extend their impact beyond the laboratory and the classroom to empower farming communities, support rural development, and contribute to food security and sustainability. Empowerment through collaborative networks increases knowledge sharing and improves marketing strategies. Community-based initiatives often serve as the entry point for leadership development. When women organize collectively, they begin to shift from isolated producers to coordinated market actors.

Examples include:

- [One Acre Fund](#) (Burundi) project supports women farmers through community-led tree planting and sustainable agriculture initiatives. Through collective action, women increased environmental resilience and created new income streams for their families. Leadership Insight: When women organize around a shared goal, they strengthen both their economic position and their confidence as community leaders.
- [La Via Campesina](#) (Zimbabwe): Agroecology and seed sovereignty training in Southern Africa: La Via Campesina, a grassroots movement, representing rural African farmers, is strengthening its presence in Zimbabwe and neighboring countries to advance agroecological approaches. Its efforts respond to the negative effects of industrial farming systems, the growing climate crisis, and recurring public health challenges. Supported by the Agroecology Fund, this initiative seeks to cultivate a new generation of leaders in regenerative agriculture. Through targeted training, community members gain knowledge on seed sovereignty, biodiversity conservation, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and climate science. The program particularly aims to empower farmers, women, young people, Indigenous communities, and migrants.

In both cases, leadership is cultivated through community structures before it translates into market advancement.

Personal Empowerment and Confidence Building

Personal empowerment and confidence building in agriculture are essential for improving productivity, fostering innovation, and enhancing the sustainability of farming operations. It involves shifting from a traditional, often dependent, mindset to an active, entrepreneurial approach, allowing farmers to take control of their decision-making, manage risks, and adopt new technologies.

Bandura's self-efficacy theory demonstrates that confidence in one's abilities predicts persistence and leadership behaviour.

The [Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index \(WEAI\)](#) is the first comprehensive and standardized measure to directly measure women's empowerment and inclusion in the agricultural sector. The WEAI is an innovative tool composed of two sub-indices: one

measures women's empowerment across five domains in agriculture, and the other measures gender parity in empowerment within the household. The tool also measures women's empowerment relative to men within their households.

Watch the video: <https://youtu.be/Mbt5lwtxS-U> and reflect on one leadership quality you want to strengthen.

2.3:2 Strengthening Participation in Value Chains

Strengthening women's participation in agricultural value chains requires more than increasing production—it involves understanding how value chains function, identifying systemic constraints, building strategic partnerships, and ensuring equitable access to markets. This integrated approach enables women farmers and agripreneurs to move from marginal positions within value chains to more influential and profitable roles.

The process begins with **Value Chain Analysis and Diagnosis**. Through participatory mapping exercises, women identify key actors, functions, and relationships across the chain—from input suppliers to processors, traders, retailers, and consumers. This mapping clarifies how products, information, and finance flow within the system and reveals who controls pricing and decision-making. Beyond structure, participants examine inefficiencies such as poor infrastructure, lack of storage, limited access to technology, or weak market information systems. Rather than addressing isolated constraints, systemic thinking encourages analysis of root causes and interconnections between production challenges, financial barriers, governance gaps, and market access limitations.

Building on this understanding, the next step focuses on Building Networks and Partnerships. Collective organization—through associations, cooperatives—strengthens bargaining power, reduces transaction costs, and enables bulk purchasing and selling. Collective action improves access to finance, inputs, and training while increasing negotiating capacity with buyers. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) further enhance infrastructure development, service provision, and investment in processing facilities or storage.

Effective participation also depends on **Linking Farmers to Markets** through structured and strategic engagement. Contract farming arrangements with supermarkets, exporters, or processors can provide stable and higher-value market access. Value addition—through processing, packaging, branding, and certification (such as Good Agricultural Practices or organic standards)—allows producers to capture a larger share of the final product's value. Direct marketing channels, including local retail partnerships or consumer-facing sales, further improve profit margins by shortening the chain. Capacity building in market standards, quality control, and post-harvest management ensures that producers meet buyer requirements and reduce losses.

Please reflect on which of the above strategies could increase your income.

Practical examples illustrate how these strategies transform women’s economic roles:

- In Ghana, [AMAATI Co. Ltd](#) —founded by Salma Abdulai, processes fonio to empower small-scale women farmers. By focusing on processing, branding, and packaging, the enterprise enables women to capture greater value than would be possible through raw commodity sales alone. This shift from primary production to value addition demonstrates how leadership and strategic positioning within the value chain increase income and resilience.
- In Mali, women-led shea butter associations have transformed traditional production into export-oriented enterprises through cooperative certification, quality improvement, and partnerships with international buyers. The Global Shea Alliance (<https://globalshea.com>) supports such initiatives by connecting producers to global markets.

2.3:3 Women’s Leadership in SSA Agriculture

Examples of women in leadership roles within agricultural cooperatives:

[Women Farmers Advancement Network \(WOFAN\)](#), **Nigeria**: Established in the 1990s, this network supports thousands of women farmers in northern Nigeria by providing training in improved farming techniques and access to modern technologies.

[P’KWI Farmer to Farmer Co-operative Society](#), **Uganda**: A case study in northeastern Uganda demonstrating that cooperative membership significantly increases women’s decision-making power at household and community levels.

Reflective Question:

What lessons from these cooperatives could be applied in your community to help women farmers take on stronger leadership roles in agriculture?

2.3:4 Activity: Value Chain Mapping Exercise

Participants are encouraged to reflect on the journey of their agricultural products from production to the final consumer. Working individually or in groups, women identify the key actors involved in their value chain—such as input suppliers, producers, processors, traders, transporters, retailers, and customers—and map how products, information, and money flow between them. They discuss where value is added at each stage, who influences pricing, and where the greatest costs or losses occur. Through this process, participants analyze bottlenecks and power dynamics within the chain and explore opportunities to strengthen their position, increase profitability, and access better markets. At the end of the exercise, each participant or group briefly presents one concrete opportunity to improve their value chain (for example, adding processing, improving packaging, collaborating with other farmers, or accessing new markets). This activity helps women connect business concepts to their own enterprises and develop practical strategies to enhance value addition, collaboration, and income generation.

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