

**APEC Workshop on Promoting Women  
Economic Empowerment through Enhancing  
Opportunities for Women in Remote Areas  
across Agri-food Chains**

**Ha Noi, Viet Nam | 11 - 12 April 2024**

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**APEC Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy**

**September 2024**



**Asia-Pacific  
Economic Cooperation**





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APEC Project: PPWE 04 2023A

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APEC#224-PP-04.3

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**APEC WORKSHOP ON PROMOTING WOMEN ECONOMIC  
EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ENHANCING OPPORTUNITIES FOR  
WOMEN IN REMOTE AREAS ACROSS AGRI-FOOD CHAINS**

*Ha Noi, Viet Nam*

*11 & 12 April 2024*

**Workshop Summary Report**

**I. Introduction**

On 11 & 12 April 2024, the “APEC Workshop on Promoting Women Economic Empowerment through Enhancing Opportunities for Women in Remote Areas across Agri-food Chains” was held in Hanoi, Viet Nam. The project was led by Viet Nam and co-sponsored by China; Peru; and Russia. Speakers and participants came from the private sector, business associations, international organizations, research institutions, and APEC economies' relevant government agencies.

The objective of the “APEC Workshop on Promoting Women Economic Empowerment through Enhancing Opportunities for Women in Remote Areas across Agri-food Chains” is to improve capacity building for APEC member economies through sharing information, experiences, best practices in empowering women through enhancing opportunities for those in agri-food chains with a focus on how to facilitate their access to necessary resources and harness e-commerce. It is in line with the La Serena Roadmap that aims to “provide capacity building activities and opportunities for networking, mentoring, and digital skills-building, among other core skills, to increase women’s business competencies and encourage their participation in the digital economy and innovation” as well as “exchange experiences and best practices that can effectively increase the participation of women in local, regional, and

global markets”.

## II. Background

According to the International Financial Corporation (IFC), which is a World Bank Group member, women, comprising 40% of the global agricultural workforce, and in some regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia 50%, significantly contribute to agribusiness value chains in the world.<sup>1</sup> It is increasingly recognized that women are key agents of change within agri-food systems, especially in rural and remote areas where women actively contribute to food security, family and community cohesion, local economic development and even act as environmental stewards.<sup>2</sup> Women are reported to encounter more barriers accessing basic productive resources in comparison to men (for example, they produce 50% of the world food but own less than 15% of its land,<sup>3</sup> 75% cannot get bank loans,<sup>4</sup> etc.); fewer education and training opportunities and access to services or limited access and know-how regarding agriculture inputs and mechanical equipment,<sup>5</sup> and so on. Additionally, women around the world currently earn about 20-30% less than their male counterparts, with a greater disparity in rural areas. As such, women, particularly those in rural and remote regions are able to benefit more from agri-food value chains<sup>6</sup> if they are able to work and access economic resources, including financial services, their own property and other productive assets as well as developing their skills and gaining market insight.<sup>7</sup>

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[https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/Industry\\_EXT\\_Content/IFC\\_External\\_Corporate\\_Site/Agribusiness/Advisory/Women+in+Agribusiness+Value+Chains/](https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/Industry_EXT_Content/IFC_External_Corporate_Site/Agribusiness/Advisory/Women+in+Agribusiness+Value+Chains/)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cargill.com/doc/1432114784048/celebrating-vital-role-of-women-across-supply-chain-leaflet.PDF>

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, 2018. The Gender Gap in Land rights. From <https://www.fao.org/3/I8796EN/i8796en.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Development Programme

<sup>5</sup>

[https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/Industry\\_EXT\\_Content/IFC\\_External\\_Corporate\\_Site/Agribusiness/Advisory/Women+in+Agribusiness+Value+Chains/](https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/Industry_EXT_Content/IFC_External_Corporate_Site/Agribusiness/Advisory/Women+in+Agribusiness+Value+Chains/)

<sup>6</sup> FAO (2011). The State of Food and Agriculture.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cargill.com/doc/1432114784048/celebrating-vital-role-of-women-across-supply-chain-leaflet.PDF>

In this sense, the project will focus on contributing to women's economic empowerment by facilitating women access to necessary resources and how to harness e-commerce based on gaining a market insight to promote their values in the agri-food chains through sharing information, experiences and best practices.

It is reported that there are approximately 600,000,000 in the APEC region's labour force,<sup>8</sup> and in many APEC economies, rural women make up half or more of the work force for primary industries such as agriculture and fisheries.<sup>9</sup> This project is expected to delivery benefits to women in agri-food in many APEC member economies.

This project is in line with the APEC 2022 AMM Declaration that states “We reaffirm our commitment to accelerate the full implementation of the La Serena Roadmap for Women and Inclusive Growth (2019-2030) to promote the empowerment of women, including women of diverse backgrounds, and advance gender equality and inclusion in our region”. With a focus on women in agri-food chains and especially those in remote areas, who have less advantages in accessing resources, the project contributes to improving capacity building, women's economic empowerment by creating spaces for digital skills-building and networking that can increase women's business competencies and diversify their employment opportunities. These activities can help narrow the gap in economic development and assist in raising living standards for women in rural and remote areas, while also contributing to poverty reduction.

The project is in line with the La Serena Roadmap for Women and Inclusive Growth (2019-2030) since it contributes to (i) promoting access to capital and assets, in both local and international markets; and (ii) facilitating collaborative learning and knowledge mobilization for women and girls in rural and remote areas, specifically access to information and communication technologies,

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.apec.org/groups/som-steering-committee-on-economic-and-technical-cooperation/working-groups/policy-partnership-on-women-and-the-economy>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.apec.org/Press/News-Releases/2019/0820\\_png](https://www.apec.org/Press/News-Releases/2019/0820_png)



learning opportunities and digital skills building and marketing training, as well as network opportunities.

Through sharing information, experiences and best practices as well as discussion in the 2-day workshop, the projects will contribute to promoting capacity building for the economies in how to promote women's access to resources and e-commerce based on the market insight. In that sense, it contributes to APEC's capacity building goals of reducing economic disparities among APEC economies; improving the economic and social well-being of the people; and deepening the spirit of community in the Asia-Pacific.

Last but not least, strengthening the sharing of best practices among women, particularly those in rural and remote communities, can assist in bridging the digital gender equality divide and countering barriers in access to education and training.

### **III. Key Issues**

#### **1. Overview of women participation in agri-food chains in rural and remote areas – opportunities, challenges and potential**

*Ms Kae Mihara, Gender Officer, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (FAO – RAP):*

According to the speaker, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)'s Strategic Framework aims to improve a better life, better nutrition, better production and a better environment through “accelerators” such as data, complements, innovation and technology. FAO has identified the themes of gender equality, youth and inclusion to promote a more systematic mainstreaming and operationalization of these issues across all of FAO's work to leave no one behind.

Through supporting the transformation to more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems, FAO developed regional priorities for the Asia-Pacific region, including: (i) transforming agri-food systems for sustainable

production and healthy diets; (ii) accelerating sustainable natural resources management for biodiversity conservation and climate action; (iii) supporting inclusive rural transformation for sustainable agri-food systems and equitable rural societies; and (iv) building sustainable and resilient agri-food systems in the Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

The FAO Regional Gender Strategy and Action Plan (2022-2025) for Asia and the Pacific requires that “gender aspects are mainstreamed in all programs and projects planned and implemented in the region”, with focus areas such as promoting women’s voice and leadership in governance; women’s access to, and control over resources, services, markets, decent work and resulting income and benefits; technology and innovation to reduce women’s work burdens and digital divide; mobilizing participation and support for men and women for transformation in agriculture based on the principles of gender equality and equal distribution of responsibilities; and enhancing gender equality mainstreaming across FAO’s systems and structures.

There are 420,000,000 smallholder farmers in the Asia-Pacific region, where there are social, economic and geographic inequalities and challenges that require efforts to be addressed for diverse and sustainable healthy diet as well as resilience and inclusiveness of agri-food chains. APEC member economies are aware of the importance of collaborating to upgrade agri-food chains as well as developing tailored strategies to address specific socio-geographic context and crises.

In this context, empowering women is prioritized given the roles they play as farmers, unpaid family workers, retailers, wage labourers, processors, and entrepreneurs, etc., contributing significantly to agri-food systems. They are key actors to ensure food security, conserve natural resources (e.g. land and water) and biodiversity management, drive the transition to efficient, resourceful, and climate-resilient agri-food systems.

However, women tend to encounter more challenges and disadvantages compared to men as they are facing with discriminatory social, economic, and political structures and norms. They tend to burden more unpaid work, inequalities in the labour markets, which limits their access to and control over resources, income, services, and technologies, undermining their benefits from agri-food value chains and markets at different levels. With the lack of sufficient sex-/age-disaggregated data, this results in lacking a comprehensive picture and analysis that possibly hinder the development of inclusive and sustainable agri-food systems.

According to FAO (2023), narrowing the gender equality gap in farm productivity and the wage gap in agri-food employment could boost the global GDP by 1% (nearly USD1 Trillion), reducing global food insecurity by about 2%, and decreasing the number of food-insecure people by 45,000,000. Empowering women in agri-food chains in general, financial inclusion/investment in particular, therefore, is necessary to bring about opportunities for both women and the economy in general since it can help to boost productivity, food security, income, and resilience. This can be done through tackling root causes of gender-based inequalities such as transforming power dynamics, social norms and relations; engaging all women, men, girls, boys, communities, institutions, policymakers, etc., to gradually create a difference.

FAO has been working with different economies to support sustainable and inclusive agri-food chains and empower women in agri-food systems. For example, in Papua New Guinea, FAO has been supporting gender and youth inclusion through EU-funded Joint Programme “Support to Rural Entrepreneurship, Investment and Trade” (STREIT) with a focus on mobilizing women, youth groups, promoting women’s leadership and economic power through improving livelihoods and growing their confidence and social influence, narrowing gender gaps through raising awareness, training, and

capacity building. In the Philippines, FAO launched a field project “Resilient Livelihoods Development for Women and Youth Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Maguindanao” focusing on families in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region, which was adversely impacted by the long and complex armed conflict and exacerbating climate change, impacting their livelihood and food security. The most vulnerable groups are women and children, who comprise the majority of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). The program focused on enhancing economic development and resilience through leveraging women’s roles and addressing their specific needs, which included training of trainers sessions on climate-resilient vegetable gardening and farming techniques and local processing; providing technical assistance in organizational development, communication and marketing; improving women’s agency and leadership to promote resilient value chains and livelihoods, etc.

In conclusion, according to FAO, women’s empowerment could help boost well-being, agricultural productivity, food security, and child nutrition. Improvements in women’s land rights and access to other productive resources might have positive impacts such as better natural resource management and reduction of violence against women and girls, while their access to agricultural extension services could increase food security, nutrition and participation, and so on. In that sense, there remains a need for quality research, sex-disaggregated data and analysis to have comprehensive solutions as well as collaborative efforts for policy reforms and tangible changes. The gender-transformative approaches are cost-effective with tangible returns that can empower women and enhance their resilience.

## **2. Identifying challenges and approaches to promote women economic empowerment in agri-food chains in rural and remote areas**

*Mr Tinnaprach Wongchittham, Chief of the Farmer and Agricultural Volunteers Development Group, Farmer Development Division, Department*

*of Agricultural Extension (DOAE), Thailand:* Thailand's agriculture is supposed to encounter two main kinds of challenges related to those in farming and market. Related to farming, they face increasing challenges as a result of climate change, increasing limited supply of water (only 23% of farmers can reach irrigation), or uncertain and unpredictable outbreak of diseases. Thailand also face aging issues when about 80% of Thailand's farmers are older than 45 years old. As a result, they might face low adaptation capability. For example, they might have less knowledge, skills, capability and/or resources to adapt or adopt agri-tech to increase agricultural productivity. They also have high average debt around THB0.23 Million per household, accounting up to 58% of total income. Regarding market challenges, they have insufficient access to market information, hence, limited market power, less knowledge and skills to increase agricultural productivity to compete efficiently in both domestic and foreign markets.

Among those common challenges, Thailand's women also face other difficulties such as limited decision-making power, lack of training and skills development, limited access to credit and finance, discriminatory gender roles and social norms, limited access and ownership of land, and so on. Despite those challenges, they are increasingly playing a more crucial role in agri-food sector given their increasing proportion (more than 50% of farm household heads registered with the Thailand Government are women). Thailand are aware of the importance of promoting women's economic participation in agri-food systems through addressing challenges of gender inequality such as addressing issues of food security (lack of inputs, knowledge and skills, and technology); training to upskill and empower women.

DOAE Thailand have started to encourage farmers and women farmers to participate in agri-food systems through 'Home Economics' project since 1968 and established a group of women in form of "Farm Woman Groups" since 1972. The "Home Economics" focuses on providing women in the agricultural sector

with knowledge related to farmer housework, farming skills and techniques (agricultural production process, food preservation, food cooking and processing, food nutrition, food hygiene, handicraft, sewing, weaving, etc.,) to improve their livelihood. There are 10,148 Farm Women Groups with 124,959 members, 119,900 of whom are women (95.95%). There are 3,852 groups in food production (farming); 3,356 cropping groups; and 346 livestock groups; 150 fishery groups; 5,202 food processing groups. These groups aim to provide knowledge and skills to improve women's capability of decision making, develop women leadership, strengthen groups and networks through training to improve the competency (growth mind set & anti-fragile; learning skills; financial literacy; digital literacy; ESG literacy for resilience, etc.,). The project aims to promote food security in farming household and community; develop agricultural products through increasing quality of food production and processing; support marketing capability to become entrepreneurs; promote the leadership roles by strengthening groups and networking.

***Ms Pham Thien Quynh, Head of Education, Health, and Social Issues, Mekong Development Research Institute (MDRI):*** In Viet Nam, agriculture plays an important role in the economy, with agriculture accounting 12% of Viet Nam's GDP; 30% of the labor force employed in agriculture; and 60% relying on agriculture for their livelihood. Among women labour force in agriculture, women account 47%, 80% in cooperatives, contributing positively to socio-economic development, especially in agriculture.

The agricultural sector has potential for development thanks to Viet Nam's priority to promote agriculture through promotion of free trade agreements (FTAs), which contributes to improving competitiveness, enhancing access to markets, and addressing climate change for green, sustainable and inclusive growth and development.

On the other hand, Vietnamese women farmers face barriers to adapt to new-age agriculture. For example, related to finance, they have sparse investment in agriculture; and smallholders' capacity for expansion is limited. Related to labour force and mode of production, according to the General Statistics Office (GSO), Viet Nam is facing the issue of aging rural population (67.2% are the elderly). A majority of agriculture labour force (70%) do not have adequate training, therefore, they might have limited ability to follow market information or signals as well limited network to remain competitive in the market.

Another issue is social norms. Many of young women in rural and remote areas get married early and are expected to sacrifice job opportunities to take care of their family and children (CPHC, 2019). Many women have to take responsibility for homemaking, child-rearing, and non-income-generating household tasks.

Also, women have limited access to education, training, and capacity building compared to men. For example, while men's average number of years in school is 8.5 years, women is just 7.6 years; among the proportion of rural population who never attend school, men account for 2.5% while women are 4.5%; regarding the proportion of trained workers, men account up to 25% domestically, 17.1% in rural areas, compared to women of 20.3% domestically and 12.5% in rural areas respectively (CPHC, 2019). This results from the issue of social norms that make women have fewer opportunities for capacity building since they are subject to higher cost of time and expectations for family roles.

Women also encounter challenges of limited autonomy over production resources, especially land. Vietnamese women face severe gender inequality in accessing production resources (FAO, 2011); Vietnamese women do not have equal access to land due to restraints in existing laws, linear practices, gender norms, either (UNDP, 2013). According to the World Bank (2020), among certificates of land use rights issued to married couples/households, 39% are issued to male heads of households, compared to only 6.2% issued to female

heads. Limited rights to own and use land hinder women from accessing financial resources (e.g., loans), which makes them more reliant on their husbands for economic decisions.

Viet Nam have carried out tailored programs to targeted areas to address women inequality and empower women economic participation. For example, among the programs is the Australia-Viet Nam Program for Gender Equality in Agriculture and Tourism (GREAT) Program conducted in the two provinces of Son La and Lao Cai for the period 2017 – 2021. The program aims to promote economic empowerment for women in these two provinces, especially focusing on increasing participation in economic activities of women in ethnic minority groups. Through participation in production and business activities, women and their families could have better access to networks, career prospects, technical support, and production inputs, as well as become more empowered in decision-making, sharing of responsibilities, and leadership duties.

***Dr James Arsenio O. Ponce, Regional Director of Department of Agrarian Reform Regional Office III; consultant of the SPLIT Program, the Philippines:*** Women in the Philippines’ agriculture encounter a number of challenges. Low quality infrastructure (e.g. insufficient source of irrigation water, dilapidated roads, etc.,) and lack of access to necessary services (e.g.: lack of pre- and post- harvest facilities, etc.,) hinder women’s economic empowerment, especially in rural and remote areas. They have limited access to agricultural inputs and services due to high production costs and low price of agricultural crops. Women have unequal access to finance and markets. They lack technical skills and knowledge due to limited access to agriculture-related trainings, services, and technology as a result of social biases.

The Philippines have identified the gender gaps and therefore, launched the Agrarian Reform Community (ARC) approach to address the issue. The development strategy was first adopted in 1993 to focus on prioritized agrarian



reform areas to maximize resource allocation, complementation and mobilization for greater efficiency and impact, taking into consideration the limited financial and material resources of the Government. The efforts were made through focusing on investing in basic infrastructure and services, including through prioritizing investments in rural infrastructure such as roads, irrigation systems, and market facilities to improve women's access to markets and integration into the value chains; strengthening healthcare and education services in rural and remote areas to enhance women's well-being and productivity; enhancing access to finance and markets. They also provided targeted financial services and market linkages for women farmers and entrepreneurs, including microcredit schemes, savings groups, and farmer cooperatives; promoted inclusive value chains that recognize and reward women's contributions and ensure equitable access to market information and opportunities. With the approach to develop technical skills and knowledge, the strategy focused on investing in agricultural training, extension services, and technology transfer programs that target women farmers and agripreneurs, fostering women's leadership and participation in agricultural organizations and decision-making processes through capacity-building initiatives and mentorship programs.

### **3. Promoting gender-sensitive value chains and strengthening institutions to promote women economic empowerment in agri-food chains**

*Dr Eun Kyung Kim, Research Fellow, Korea Women's Development Institute (KWDI), Korea:* In Korea, the proportion of female workers in agricultural and rural areas is increasing significantly, and the value of gender equality is a core concept for the sustainability of agricultural and rural areas. However, in rural areas, women's status is not improving while strong social stereotypes exist. To improve the level of gender equality in agriculture and rural areas, the Government have made great efforts to address gender inequality challenges. Korea have promulgated the "Support of Female Farmers and Fishers Act" since 2001 and the 5<sup>th</sup> Basic Plan (2021 – 2025) to support women in agriculture and

aquaculture value chains with a focus on raising awareness of gender equality in specific rural areas.

Training programs to raise women's awareness as well as capability to participate in economic activities are designed through surveys and research, based on collection, analysis, and construction of gender equality data in rural areas to develop General Education (GE) Training Program and customized GE for specific rural areas. The gender training programs cover 4 topics with 16 modules, educational content customized for each target. They provide lectures to help women, who are the main players in agricultural and rural society, improve their understanding of policies related to agriculture and female farmers. The main goals are to understand gender sensitivity and gender stereotypes, and improve awareness to realize gender equality in agriculture and rural areas; establish understanding of rural women's dual labor and women's roles based on women's self-respect; understand gender inequality in rural communities and take action to create gender-equal rural villages; understand policies for gender-equal agriculture and rural areas and take action for rural change through female village leaders.

There remain differences in the implementation of female farmer related policies depending on the will of local governments and the interests and capabilities of local female farmers. However, it is important to strengthen women's economic capabilities in agricultural and rural value chains through realizing and increasing the awareness of gender equality in rural areas.

***Dr Diadem B Gonzales-Esmero, Program Leader of the Rice Business Innovations System (RiceBIS), the Philippines:*** In the Philippines, it is recognized that the agriculture encounters some challenges such as inadequate mechanisms, lack of knowledge or capacity, failure to recognize gender needs and social dynamics, hence, limited adoption of technology and sustainability of Research and Development (R&D) projects, etc. In particular, smallholder

farmers are unable to benefit from the price differential between farm gate and market price of their products. They have limited opportunity in understanding the dynamics of the market supply and demand conditions, economy of scale, etc. Most these smallholders operate largely in local markets due to lack of connectivity to more lucrative markets at regional or whole-economy level, which results from the facts that incentives remain weak, investments are low, and the level of technology adoption and productivity is limited. Identifying and linking smallholder producers to productive opportunities can significantly increase incomes as they access lucrative markets and sell value added products. In that sense, it is recommended that implementation of supportive policies, establishment of enabling mechanism, and provisions of training should be in place to address above-mentioned challenges.

Understanding the challenges and importance of supporting smallholder farmers including women farmers, they realize the importance of shifting from agriculture to agro-enterprise, which focus more on business and market opportunities rather than only on “what and how to produce”. The Gender Mainstreaming in RiceBIS Program 2.0 was launched with the goal to revitalize rice-based farming communities through the development and scaling of inclusive agro-enterprise models with improved value chain efficiency. In particular, it aims to identify, catalyze, and assess different inclusive agro-enterprise models; enhance farmers’ capacity for organizational management and agri-preneurship with gender-based considerations; strengthen farmers’ market linkage, ensuring that their product quality and safety assurance practices meet market requirements; and provide policy recommendations and technical assistance related to market-oriented rice-based farming and small- and medium-scale agro-enterprise development with gender equality perspective.

Through the program, it is expected to increase women farmers’ participation, strengthen their capacities and RiceBIS communities, equip them with

bargaining power and attain economies of scale, and improve link between rice and rice-based products markets. Thanks to increased capacity in organizing production, aggregation, value addition, marketing, transport and logistics, they can sell directly to high value markets and capture greater value from the value chain.

The program has successfully developed 23 RiceBIS communities. Under its implementation, after conducting community assessments, the RiceBIS 2.0 focal persons are able to develop community business plans, which includes gender roles and 24 hour-analysis to determine specific differentials in their participation on agri-preneurship. They can lay out a written road map for the communities from marketing, financial, and operational standpoints. This shall be a comprehensive, long-term plan that addresses the communities and its clusters' needs for marketing, improvement in productivity, operation, and organization development, financing; and sustainability. The end goal of the business plan is to develop communities into commercially viable cluster business enterprises which will contribute to increasing income of its members and a dynamic cluster of the local value chains.

#### **4. Identifying resources to strengthen capacities and involvement of women in agri-food chains**

*Mr Tinnaprach Wongchittham, Chief of the Farmer and Agricultural Volunteers Development Group, Farmer Development Division, Department of Agriculture Extension (DOAE), Thailand:* Advancing women's political participation, leadership and economic empowerment are central to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).” It is important to highlight access to markets sustainable growth and development since “in a globalized world, when people become more integrated into markets, it is essential not just to produce, but to sell, and to do this, it is increasingly necessary to market products”.

Markets are recognized as a key component of development. In that sense, it is important to advance women's capacity of entrepreneurship.

In the case of Wyn Wan Farm Woman Group in Phetchaburi, Thailand, they focus on the approach of promoting "From Farm Woman Group to Community Enterprise". DOAE offers training programs and resources on food production and marketing as entrepreneurship approaches in agri-food value chains through virtual training (field trips, etc.). DOAE has also co-operated with other organizations including local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide training programs specifically targeted to women in agriculture. They provide support for women to access information and technology to catch up with innovation to remain competitive in production and markets. They provide finance support, e.g., through the "Group Money Saving & Fund". Besides, women are supported to develop networks and access market through groups shops, community markets, network markets or social networks, etc.

***Dr Pham Thi To Oanh, Director, Department of Policy and Cooperative Development, Viet Nam Cooperative Alliance (VCA), Viet Nam:*** Of 31,906 cooperatives in all sectors (agriculture, transportation, construction, commerce, services, environment, etc.) in Viet Nam, agriculture cooperatives account up to 66%, and women up to 48.2%. Women take an important role in Viet Nam's economy and policies, which include the promulgation of the 2023 Law on Cooperatives; the Resolution No. 20-NQ/TW dated June 16, 2022 of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Viet Nam; the Decision No.01/QĐ-TTg dated January 3, 2023 of Prime Minister endorsing the plan to support women to start-up for the period 2017 – 2025; the three (03) Viet Nam Target Programs, namely: (i) New Rural Viet Nam Target Program; Viet Nam Target Program on Sustainable Poverty Reduction; and Viet Nam Target Program on Mountainous and Ethnic Development.

Women are recognized to play important roles in the agri-food chains including in the accumulation and concentration of agricultural land, the formation of concentrated production areas and large-scale production areas; organizing collective activities to produce large, uniform and quality products to meet enterprise requirements and reduce production costs, and so on.

On the other hand, they encounter a number of difficulties in participating in and benefiting from the agriculture values chains. First of all, currently, the production scale is still fragmented with low quality and standard production, which is a result from lack of famers' (including women farmers) capacity to access the market. They mainly participate in low-value stages such as cultivation, collection, preliminary processing and export of raw products. They do not pay adequate attention and lack experiences in accessing market more efficiently through investing in branding, packaging, design, labels, and product traceability, etc. Besides, trade promotion activities and capacity building programs to farmers and women farmers are not efficient enough to address the challenges and support them to access market.

It is recommended that supporting women should be prioritized and realized to harness their participation in the economy and agri-food chains, which include promulgating policies, proposing concrete solutions to mobilize internal resources for production, and providing necessary services to support women's participation in agri-food values chains, and so on.

##### **5. E-commerce in promotion of women economic empowerment in agri-food chains in rural and remote areas – identifying opportunities, challenges and issues**

*Mr Shen Guoji, Director, Department of Market and Informatization, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, China:* China have witnessed a rapid development in agricultural e-commerce. Online retail sales of agricultural products increased 9.2 percent year-on-year in 2022, 6.4 percent higher than the

growth rate in 2021 and 5.6 percent higher than the growth rate of total online retail sales in rural areas. Agricultural e-commerce has also become a major driving force, fostering the growth of new business formats, including characteristic farming, rural tourism, cultural exhibitions, livestreaming sales, etc. At the end of 2021, the broadband coverage in China's administrative villages had reached 100 percent, while the coverage of fiber and 4G networks exceeded 99 percent. Internet penetration in rural areas had reached 58.8 percent by June 2023, and the coverage of delivery service points in towns exceeded 98 percent. At the same time, other service sectors such as electronic payments, express logistics, marketing, online store design and operation have also developed significantly.

Thanks to e-commerce development, women have obtained more opportunities and benefits. For example, there are more job opportunities for women with different educational backgrounds, especially those with lower education levels. Spread of e-commerce also transformed traditional beliefs and norms on women. These factors contribute to women fully unleashing their individual potential, improving the overall employment environment for women, as well as more opportunities to access market thanks to lower barriers to start business and more access to resources, enabling them to stay updated on market information, exploring raw data, shortening time from business identification, etc.

In recognition of e-commerce's contribution to unleash women's potential, it is highlighted that more continuous efforts should be made to promote and harness e-commerce. First of all, it is important to enhance rural female awareness of and enthusiasm for e-commerce through harnessing platforms to promote successful female entrepreneurs and build positive role models to inspire more women to venture into e-commerce and embrace innovation; assisting more rural women to participate in e-commerce development by guiding e-commerce enterprises to establish closer cooperation with rural female cooperatives, family farms and other entities; and promoting a mechanisms for collaborative win-win

partnerships, etc. Secondly, more efforts should be made with a focus on training and empowerment to enhance the entrepreneurial and employment capabilities for rural women in e-commerce through creating more opportunities and platforms for women from rural and remote communities, developing learning and training resources and courses at different levels, and exploring internet-based and hands-on training models tailored for female entrepreneurs; and intensifying training on digital skills for rural women, encouraging and guiding platform enterprises to carry out public welfare training on digital literacy for rural women, especially those in rural and remote areas. Thirdly, it should be considered leveraging platform advantages to provide more entrepreneurial and employment opportunities for rural women through expanding channels for female employment and entrepreneurship in the digital economy sector, guiding and encouraging relevant companies and platforms, especially those operating in various segments of the e-commerce industry chains; encouraging enterprises in the fields of digital trade, e-commerce, and livestream content creation to offer more “mom-friendly” job opportunities and strengthen support for rural female employment and entrepreneurship projects. Fourthly, harnessing the power of social diversity to create an enabling environment for rural women to participate in the optimized development of the digital economy through providing subsidy-based training funds and support for women who face employment challenges, such as women from rural and remote communities, women with disabilities and female university graduates; providing incubation and support in terms of entrepreneurial funding and inclusive finance, and so on.

***Ms Bernadetta Raras, Supply Chain Management and IT Director, Indonesia:***

Data from the Indonesia Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2020 shows that Indonesia have approximately 27,500,000 farmers, with women comprising around 30% of this workforce. Despite their significant contributions to agriculture, women farmers continue to encounter many obstacles. Women are burdened by the double responsibility of taking care of household chores and



working outside the home. There is a gender equality gap in access to land and capital, with women having fewer opportunities than men. Lack of education and digital skills hinders women's participation in agriculture. Societal expectations about women's roles can act as barriers to their participation in agriculture. With the efforts to drive social economic inclusion, Indonesia launch the ID Food initiatives to boost women's participation in e-commerce. ID Food is Indonesia's State-Owned Food Holding that supports food security and inclusivity for farmers, fishermen, and small and medium enterprises (SMEs). ID Food is committed to creating an integrated system from upstream to downstream to help connect food commodities to end users through digitizing transportation and distribution, digitizing logistics, and agriculture 4.0 on the upstream side. This system recognizes that supply chain is an ecosystem which can be maximized with a digital platform that enables new operating models through visibility along the chain. Indonesia also launches PISAgro, a public - private partnership (PPP) that seeks to provide an innovative, multi-stakeholder model to answer the economy's agricultural challenges in a sustainable manner while improving the livelihoods of smallholder farmers.

## **6. Sharing further experiences from APEC economies**

***Dr Tae Hyun Kim, Agricultural Researcher, Korea Institute of Agricultural Sciences, Rural Development Administration, Korea:*** The Rural Development Administration (RDA) of South Korea is a governmental institution, committed to agriculture research, technology dissemination and international cooperation. Established since 1962, RDA has played an important role in the development of agricultural technologies in Korea, especially through collaborating with universities, government-funded research institutes and then disseminating it to farmers and business persons through 9 agricultural research and extension services and 156 agricultural tech service centers.

In response to the increasing impacts of climate change, RDA developed a “Future Digital Climate Map for Agricultural Use” based on climate scenarios to develop suitable cultivation areas for major crops. For example, when the temperature rises by 1 degree, the cultivated areas move up about 80km north and rise 150m above the altitude. The cultivation areas for apples will decrease, and the areas for pears, peaches and grapes are expected to increase first and then gradually decrease.

To solve these various agricultural issues, the smart farming has been introduced with the aims to improve productivity, reduce costs, as well as improve farmers’ life quality. The Korean smart farm project is a long-term project to secure independent agricultural production technology that can compete with advanced agricultural economies by developing technologies suitable for agricultural environment and field conditions without importing, applying, or simply imitating foreign advanced technology. Korea also launched the policy of “ICT converged measures to spread agricultural food” with a number of support projects to promote agricultural productivity. In 2018, the related ministries jointly announced “Smart farm expansion plan”, covering all protected horticulture, livestock and open-fields. This plan aimed to supply smart farm technology to 7,000 ha of horticulture and 5,750 livestock houses by 2022, and to build four smart farm innovation valleys. In 2021, the related ministries including RDA jointly announced the “Smart agriculture expansion measures based on big data and artificial intelligence” to strengthen the use of big data and AI apart from ICT equipment.

In line with the Government’s policy, in 2021, RDA established a basic plan for promoting digital agriculture to improve agricultural productivity, convenience, and environment through diagnosing agricultural sites with data and artificial intelligence (AI) and developing digital agriculture technologies to improve crops’ productivity, precise cultivation, and smart distribution and management.

*Ms Danyan Lin, Deputy Director of Information Center, Women's Studies Institute of China:* By incorporating a gender equality perspective into new sectors such as the digital economy, and prioritizing women, especially rural women, in making and implementing macro policies, China have strived to create favorable conditions for women's participation in the digital economy including e-commerce through the launch and implementation of the Program for the Development of Women in China (2021- 2030); and the Action Plan for Digital Development (2022-2025). Business and non-profit organizations also make strong efforts to empower women by harnessing e-commerce through free trainings, employment opportunities, funding, technical and traffic support, etc. Women's federations in China also significantly contribute to helping rural women in agriculture through providing trainings, financial support, as well as policy advocacy and changing traditional social economic perspectives.

#### **IV. Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusions**

Through the active sharing of information and experiences at the Workshop, speakers and participants exchanged views on how to promote women economic empowerment in rural and remote areas across agri-food chains. Recommendations are summarized as below:

##### ***1. Recommendations for women-led/managed enterprises in agri-food chains***

- Need more tailored trainings to support women in agri-food chains such as business plan and management, financial and digital literacy, information and knowledge on market access, etc.

##### ***2. Recommendations for APEC member economies/governments***

- Develop learning materials/programs to provide and enhance capacity building targeted to women in agri-food chains.
- Promote networks to connect and support women in agri-food chains.

- Develop policies to support women business in agri-food chains, as well as provide labour opportunities and social protection.
- Focus to provide technical assistance, technology and innovation capacity for women in agri-food chains.
- Support women in agri-food chains with capital (tailored for women) or through women friendly financial schemes and products.
- Analyse and develop gender gap training programs to support women's needs in agri-food chains.
- Promote and enable a favourable environment to promote women's participation in digital economy.

### **3. *Recommendations for APEC***

- APEC should leverage a digital platform to share knowledge on and/or disseminate mature technologies.
- APEC should make efforts to strengthen partnership to upscale technologies and promote women's participation in agri-food value chains.
- APEC should enhance/promote STEM and digital literacy opportunities for rural and remote women and girl children.
- APEC should strengthen the collection of sex-disaggregated data and gender-specific information to support economies capture an understanding of gender equality gaps and women-specific -sensitive issues to develop more efficient and effective policies, frameworks and efforts to promote women economic empowerment.

Hereinabove are some recommendations from the workshop's participants and speakers that require further thoughts and discussions at the upcoming PPWE meetings to transform into more concrete and practical activities.