1. INTRODUCTION

Togo is one of only eight African countries that reported in the 2021 Biennial Review of CAADP a perfect score of 10 for the performance category 4.4 on women’s participation in agriculture, which commits governments to promote initiatives that facilitate preferential entry and participation for women in gainful and attractive agri-business opportunities (AU 2022). Togo has adopted and implemented a broad range of legal frameworks, policies, and institutional and programmatic interventions over the last decade to empower women and enhance opportunities for them in the country’s agri-food systems. These interventions have put Togo on track to achieve the CAADP target of ensuring that 20 percent of rural women have access to productive assets, including land, credit, inputs, and financial services and information by 2023 (AU 2017). With a score of 38.3 in 2023, the country is also performing better than the African average on the OECD’s Social Institutions & Gender Index, which evaluates laws, social norms, and practices that restrict women’s and girls’ rights.
and access to empowerment opportunities and resources (OECD 2023).

At the same time, Togo has also achieved significant milestones with regard to women’s economic inclusion, as reflected in the increase in the proportion of women entrepreneurs and business owners (République Togolaise 2021) and a steady increase in the number of women participating in national and local political processes. For the first time in its history, the positions of Prime Minister, President of the National Assembly, Secretary General of the Presidency, and Minister of Defense are all occupied by women. Guided by its international, continental, and national commitments to women’s empowerment and gender equality as well as to food security, nutrition, and poverty alleviation, Togo is taking active and innovative steps to address overlapping challenges in these areas.

Togo signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1983 and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, more commonly known as the Maputo Protocol, in 2005. Nevertheless, while the country is making progress on political representation, budgeting, education, and financial inclusion, women in Togo continue to face socio-cultural constraints, such as child marriage, lack of education, and limited access to healthcare and social services, which prevent them from fully participating in and benefitting from food systems.

2. INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATIONS

The Government of Togo has demonstrated a solid commitment to prioritizing the advancement of women, evidenced by the creation in 1977 of the Direction Générale de la Promotion de la Femme (DGPF—General Directorate for the Promotion of Women) and over the years ministries focused on youth, gender, women, education and development, and social action. The creation of these institutions facilitated the implementation of development programs and projects that focus primarily on women, in line with the government’s changing development approaches and objectives. In addition, creating the National Fund for Inclusive Finance (FNFI) was a decisive turning point in women’s agricultural empowerment by facilitating their access to finance.

2.1. Ministry of Social Action, the Promotion of Women, and Literacy

The Ministère de L’Action Sociale, de la Promotion de la Femme, et de l’Alphabétisation (MASPFA—Ministry of Social Action, the Promotion of Women, and Literacy) has its origins in the Department of Social Affairs, dating back to 1962. Over time, the missions of the department evolved, given changing social needs and visions. The Ministry was established as a Secretariat of State, at times associated with the Ministry of Health and at other times with the Ministry of Public Service. In 2007, the literacy subsector was attached to the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. In 2010 a specific Ministry for the promotion of women was created. In 2013, the three main areas of the Ministry’s work—social action, women’s promotion, and literacy—were grouped into ministerial departments.

MASPFA’s primary objective is to assist vulnerable people and coordinate emergency relief during natural disasters. The Ministry also is responsible for developing literacy and education programs targeting young people, particularly women. It also collaborates with non-governmental organizations (NGO) and other partners to meet international commitments. Additionally, the Ministry monitors the implementation at the national level of international resolutions and recommendations on issues for which it has a mandate within the government. In this regard, the Ministry conducts studies to guide government policies and the actions of NGOs, associations, and partners (MASPFA 2023). MASPFA is structured into several directorates, including the General Directorate for the Promotion of Women.

The General Directorate for the Promotion of Women was created under Decree No. 77-162 of 16 August 1977. Although the DGPF changed its status several times—towards the Ministry of Women’s Promotion in 2010 and now as a part of MASPFA—its original mandate remains unchanged. This is to propose, implement, and monitor policies for gender equity, equality, and family development in Togo, while conducting necessary studies and analyses (MASPFA 2014). DGPF has three divisions: Gender and Women’s Rights; Cooperation and Promotion of Women’s Economic Activities; and Family, Education, and Training of Young Girls.
The Gender and Women’s Rights Division is responsible for designing legal instruments that promote and protect women, ensuring the application in Togo of commitments the country made to international conventions on women’s rights, and developing and implementing national policies for promoting women’s economic activities (MASPFA 2023). Between 2014 and 2019, Togo implemented six new laws and amended three others to support gender equality and women’s empowerment. These include measures to halve the deposit needed for female election candidates to run for political office in order to increase women’s representation in local and national government; to guarantee women’s access to land ownership; to abolish certain taxes that hinder women’s entrepreneurship, including in the agriculture sector; to create a legal framework for e-commerce; and to criminalize violence and discrimination against women (Republique Togolaise 2019). Some measures, such as the 20 percent quota of public procurement reserved for young women, have also been taken to promote and encourage the participation of young entrepreneurs and women in public procurement. This quota has since been increased to 25 percent (Présidence de la République Togolaise 2019).

2.2. Ministry of Grassroots Development, Youth, and Youth Employment

Young women in Togo also benefit from support through the Ministère du Développement à la Base, de la Jeunesse et de l’Emploi des Jeunes (MDBJEJ—Ministry of Grassroots Development, Youth, and Youth Employment). MDBJEJ is responsible for organizing and assisting local communities in guiding young people toward socioeconomic and professional development by implementing policies to help lift out of poverty Togo’s poorest people in rural, urban, and peri-urban regions. The Ministry works with development partners to support education and employment infrastructure and to conduct activities on financial education and inclusion, labor markets and employment, microfinance, and productive economic inclusion (socialprotection.org 2023). In 2022, the Ministry mobilized funds to support youth entrepreneurship by training 9,250 young people and women, providing over CFA 1.21 billion to young entrepreneurs, creating 15,500 sustainable jobs through youth micro-businesses, and reserving over CFA 1.11 billion in public contracts for young people and women entrepreneurs (MDBJEJ 2022).

Through the Agence Nationale d’Appui au Développement à la Base (ANADEB—National Agency for Grassroots Development Support), the Ministry implements projects primarily targeting women. Among these is the Programme d’Urgence de Développement Communautaire (PUDC), which has enabled more than one million people, 60 percent of whom are women, to benefit from improvements in their living conditions and improved access to energy, education, and quality health care. ANADEB also runs the basic social safety net program—Projet de Filets Sociaux et Services de Base (Social Safety Nets and Basic Services Project)—that provides cash transfers to households and supports the development of income-generating activities for the economic inclusion of vulnerable households.

2.3. National Fund for Inclusive Finance

Le Fonds National de la Finance Inclusive (FNFI—National Fund for Inclusive Finance) is a public entity that was established in 2013 to promote accessible finance for all, especially the underprivileged, through a network of reliable partners and providers of diversified financial services and tools. It is overseen by the Ministry of Financial Inclusion and the Informal Sector Organization. FNFI’s objective is to improve access to finance for all by connecting borrowers to development and decentralized financing structures. Its mission is to improve the operations and financial capabilities of decentralized financial service providers to better meet local customers’ needs. FNFI also supports the development of loan guarantee mechanisms to protect these institutions (FNFI 2020).

FNFI supports women in Togo to access financial resources to invest in income-generating activities by providing credit at lower interest rates (Devex 2023). FNFI has allowed women in Togo to obtain loans they can repay over a reasonable period. This has allowed them to expand and diversify their agricultural businesses by selling crops like cereals, maize, soya, and beans. For example, a loan from FNFI fundamentally altered the business trajectory for Nabede Awilanéna, who used a loan of CFA 3.5 million (USD 5,800) to scale up her retail enterprise to a wholesale cereal trade enterprise by broadening her supplier base. This successful
2.4. Technical and Vocational Training Agency

In 2018, the Government of Togo created L’Agence Education-Développement (AED—the Technical and Vocational Training Agency) to foster on-farm and off-farm employment in rural areas focusing on youth and women (AED 2019). AED has so far created two vocational training centers—Instituts de Formation en Alternance pour le Développement (IFAD—Alternative Development Training Institutes). The one at Elavagnon focuses on aquaculture (AED 2021), while livestock is the focus of the institute at Barkoissi (République Togolaise 2021). The aim of the centers is to impart hands-on skills to selected youth and women in rural areas to enable those trainees to obtain self-employment and engage in entrepreneurship. So far, 235 women and young people have graduated in aquaculture and received a starter package, including cages from the Ministry of Fisheries to start fish farming in lakes. In addition, 180 trainees graduated from the IFAD livestock center (Agridigitale 2022).

3. POLICY INNOVATIONS

The Government of Togo has implemented a series of reforms to promote inclusive growth, including the promotion of women, with a particular focus on education. Following the Beijing World Conference on Women, Togo embarked on initiatives to mitigate gender disparities and promote gender equality. It has done so by making efforts to align its national legislation with the international texts governing the advancement of women, gender equality, and gender balance.

Additionally, the country has passed several corresponding laws to strengthen women’s rights and promote gender equity; reinforce women’s rights to social security; improve their civil status, family positioning, and matrimonial rights; protect women against physical harassment and violence; and enable equitable access to all positions in public service. These reforms have been instrumentalized by establishing national policies, notes, and plans, and have proven to be instrumental in advancing economic and social integration and empowering women (MASPFA 2014, MPF 2011, Assemblée Nationale 2022).

Legal reforms in Togo have also resulted in new rights for women, including the ability to work and make financial decisions for their household, as well as providing women with easier access to credit to finance their income-generating activities. The government has also made efforts to educate the public on these reforms, resulting in increased awareness and demand for information on women’s socioeconomic rights, such as about inheritance and property ownership. Women are also more willing to engage in entrepreneurial activities as they no longer require their husband’s authorization to engage in business (Affoum and Dry 2022).
3.1. National Gender Equity and Equality Policy (PNEEG)

Among the most impactful of the policy innovations promoted by the Togolese government has been the adoption of the Politique Nationale de l’Equité et de l’Egalité de Genre (PNEEG—the National Gender Equity and Equality Policy) in 2011. The Government of Togo formulated the policy to facilitate the mainstreaming of equity, equality, and empowerment of women and girls across all sectors of the economy and planning processes, including their effective participation in decision-making at all levels of Togo’s development process. It since has formed the basis for national budgetary allocations, gender mainstreaming across sectors, and influenced legal amendments to meet its ambitions.

PNEEG presents a framework of reference and orientation for all development actors and is aligned with the National Development Plan, the Government Roadmap 2020-2025, as well as relevant regional and international frameworks. Implemented by MASPFA, PNEEG has five strategic orientations, out of which one is directly relevant to women in agri-food systems. Strategic orientation two of the PNEEG seeks to increase the productive capacity of women and their income by ensuring equal access to and control of productive resources, such as land. Through this objective, the Government of Togo aims to equip women with skills and access to credit for business opportunities. As a result of the Government’s efforts to carry out this element of PNEEG, the share of all women accessing credit increased from 45 percent in 2015 to 66 percent in 2020 (UNDP 2022).

Uniquely, PNEEG formed the basis in 2022 for the first gender-responsive ministerial budgets of the Government of Togo, set by the Prime Minister. In this process, six pilot ministries covering approximately one-third of the state budget and 70 percent of the workforce received their budget allocations with specific instructions on how to take into account gender responsiveness and fairness. The Government of Togo intends to extend this budgeting approach to all ministries and institutions in the future (MEF 2021).

Since its adoption, PNEEG has triggered several legal and institutional reforms to protect women’s rights in Togo. Those include:

- The Code des Personnes et de la Famille (CPF—Personal and Family Code) was revised in 2012 and further amended in 2014 to provide women with rights that promote their protection, fulfillment, and equality with men. These rights include equality between spouses, shared responsibility for household and family duties, and protection for women during marriage dissolution. Gender considerations also are now addressed in orders of succession. While the code continues to allow for consideration of traditional customs, a declaration now is required from spouses with mention made of this on relevant succession certificates (UN Human Rights Council 2022).

- In the revised Land Law of 2018, Article 8 guarantees equal rights between men and women with regard to land access (République Togolaise 2018). The country eliminated in the text of the land code ambiguity on customary and modern tenure systems that penalized women (UNDP 2022).

- Also in 2018, a measure was taken to grant 20 percent of public procurement to young and female entrepreneurs. This procurement preference was subsequently raised in 2019 to 25 percent. This enabled 600 women out of a total of 2,500 registered entrepreneurs to preferentially participate in public tenders. In addition, efforts have been made to regularly build the capacities of these women so they can successfully apply for calls for tenders via simplified procurement procedures (République Togolaise 2018).

- In 2022, sexual violence and harassment in schools were criminalized (Présidence de la République 2022). The law doing so also promotes sexual health education in schools to curb teen pregnancies.

- PNEEG also empowered women to seek votes for elected positions. In the municipal elections of 2019, 219 women were trained on election processes and 189 of them were elected as municipal councilors (UNDP 2022).
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3.2. Togolese Government Roadmap 2025

In response to the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Togo’s economy, the Government of Togo adopted in 2020 a development plan, the Feuille de Route Gouvernementale Togo 2025 (Togolese Government Roadmap 2025), to guide the country’s economic growth and transformation (République Togolaise 2020). The strategic drivers of growth and social welfare prioritized in the plan include access to quality education; increased employment opportunities; support for smallholder farmers; the transformation of Togo into a regional logistical hub; and strengthening emergency preparedness. Two specific strategic interventions of the roadmap are crucial for women’s empowerment in agri-food systems:

- **Strategic Intervention 1 on strengthening social inclusion and peace** aims at ensuring health coverage and close physical access to basic services, including health care and education. Public investments under this intervention will be directed towards providing 95 percent of the rural population with access to clean drinking water and 86 percent with access to WASH facilities. To ensure access to health services, the Government pledged to provide 60 percent of Togo’s citizens with universal health coverage, with a focus on pregnant women, children, and vulnerable populations. The government also will direct public investments to develop the health services infrastructure so that at least 95 percent of the population can access basic services within a walkable distance, i.e., less than 5 km distance or 45 minutes travel time. In 2015, 67 percent of the population had access to basic health services. Further, following the adoption in 2021 of a law instituting universal health coverage (Assemblée Nationale 2021), the Government of Togo allocated 19 billion CFA (almost USD 32 million) to achieve such coverage in 2022 (Togo First 2022).

- **Strategic Intervention 2 on job creation** aims at modernizing agriculture to increase farmers’ income and create employment in the rural sector. Public investments will be directed towards raising agricultural productivity through improved agricultural extension services, technology, and infrastructure, such as feeder roads and irrigation. The project aims to develop 4,000 km of additional feeder roads to enable farmers easier access to markets (République Togolaise 2020). In parallel, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Rural Development has initiated a program to promote Women and Youth Entrepreneurship in agribusiness—Camp du Futur Togo 2020. With the aim to enable them to start their own businesses, around 15,000 women and youth across the country were trained in agribusiness management in 2020 under the program (MAEDR 2020).
3.3. Policy and Strategic Plan for the Transformation of Agriculture in Togo by 2030

Le Politique Agricole Assortie du Plan Stratégique pour la Transformation de l’Agriculture au Togo à l’Horizon 2030 (PA-PSTAT 2030—The Policy and Strategic Plan for the Transformation of Agriculture in Togo by 2030) was formulated in 2015 as a blueprint to guide agricultural modernization in Togo towards food security and export promotion (MAEH 2015). Although the benefits of the policy are geared toward the general farming community and industry, women benefit greatly from the three strategic operational goals of the policy:

- Sustainably increasing production and value-addition in the agricultural sector;
- Improving access to factors of production and modernizing production infrastructure; and
- Promoting technological innovation and professional training and ensuring the effective dissemination of the best techniques to support agricultural transformation.

One of the guiding principles for the implementation of the agricultural policy is “social equity, gender and the reduction of regional disparities”. In this regard, Togo’s agricultural policy provides for a minimum of 30 percent of labor force being female. Furthermore, the at least 40 percent of the direct beneficiaries of any investment projects should be women. To this end, gender-sensitive strategies have been established within the Ministry of Agriculture, such as the implementation of gender responsive budgeting (budgétisation sensible au genre).

The PA-PSTAT 2030 is implemented through the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Rural Development through specifically designed programs and projects. For example, the Programme d’Urgence de Développement Communautaire (PUDC—Program on Urgent Community Development) was a large-scale infrastructure and rural entrepreneurship project implemented from 2016 to 2018 to provide access to basic services for rural populations by creating temporary employment opportunities for many in building infrastructure, such as health facilities, schools, and rural markets. The CFA 155 billion (USD 260 million) project reached one million people, of whom 60 percent were women (UNDP 2022, UNDP 2016). The final evaluation report of the PUDC showed that the rural population benefited from 406 km of feeder roads, 15 health posts, and 63 schools established. Women in particular benefited from the construction of three large markets and women’s centers, which relieved them from the challenges of selling food items in the open air (Bushayija and Agbekponou 2020).

As part of the implementation of PA-PSTAT, the Ministry, through the Programme National d’Investissement Agricole et de Sécurité Alimentaire (PNIASA—National Program for Agricultural Investment and Food Security), implemented measures from 2012 to 2015 to revitalize the Togolese agriculture sector and increase its impact on the country’s economic development. PNIASA integrated gender considerations into project planning and monitoring to ensure that 40 percent of the beneficiaries of PNIASA projects were women.

- Of the over 4,200 beneficiaries of an investment and savings club (tontine) support component of the Projet d’Appui au Secteur Agricole (PASA—Agricultural Sector Support Project), a project under PNIASA, 39 percent were women. Similarly, 42 percent of the beneficiaries of a PASA component providing assistance to farmers for production and transformation were women (FAO and CEDEAO 2018).

- In part to improve women’s access to cropland, the government established Zones d’Aménagements Agricoles Planifiées (ZAAP—Planned Agricultural Development Zones) from 2011 onwards in which land was allocated to individuals or farmer groups. In the group allocation process, priority was given to women’s groups or those in which more than half of members were women. For individual beneficiaries, 60 percent of the sites developed in the zones were allocated to women.

- To increase the use of small-scale agricultural machines and animal-powered cultivation, women were targeted in the implementation of the Projet d’Appui au Développement Agricole au Togo (PADAT—Support to Agricultural Development Project). Of the beneficiaries that received equipment kits through the program, 21 percent were women.
In order to maintain a gender perspective in program development and implementation, the Ministry of Agriculture has incorporated into its standard planning processes a gender diagnosis with an action plan. The diagnosis is used to identify gender-related issues that are likely to arise in the development and implementation of the proposed program. Those involved in the planning then propose recommendations to address those issues so that the gender-specific objectives of the program are achieved.

3.4. Education Sector Plan 2014–2025

The Education Sector Plan 2014-2025 focuses on enabling otherwise-marginalized children to obtain good educations. The children targeted include those from disadvantaged and low-income families, those from rural areas, those with disabilities, ethnic minorities, street children, and those from nomadic families (République Togolaise 2014). Specifically for girls, the Education Sector Plan 2014-2025 aims to improve their access and retention in primary and secondary school and encourages them to pursue industrial training by providing financial assistance. It also proposes supporting girls in disadvantaged areas through scholarships, school kits, and a fund potentially financed by the government and its development partners. Togo has had a law since 1984 (Act no. 84-14 on the Protection of Girls and Boys) to protect students enrolled in educational institutions or vocational training centers (UNESCO 2022).

In national education policy, efforts to reduce Togo’s illiteracy rate will focus on helping women in rural areas become functionally literate to improve their income-generating abilities. The national adult illiteracy rate was estimated at 43 percent in 2010. The goal of the education policy is to decrease this to 16 percent by 2025 (République Togolaise 2014).

4. PROGRAMMATIC INTERVENTIONS

In recent years, the Government of Togo has adopted numerous initiatives and projects to safeguard and improve women’s rights and empowerment across all aspects of public life, including in agri-food systems. These efforts have focused on improving the education of girls, enhancing women’s involvement in agri-food industries, and promoting women’s social, economic, and political inclusion and representation. As this report focuses on women in agri-food systems, the programmatic interventions highlighted in this section are those that make an explicit contribution to women’s empowerment in food systems.

4.1. Novissi cash transfer platform

In support of those working in the informal sector and whose daily income had been disrupted by COVID-19, the Government of Togo through its Ministry of Digital Economy, in collaboration with the World Bank and other partners, set up the Novissi cash transfer platform in April 2020. Operational for one year, Novissi—meaning ‘solidarity’ in the Éwé language—provided monthly financial aid to the most vulnerable individuals and families throughout the COVID-19 health emergency, with a particular focus on women. For maximum coverage and outreach to vulnerable persons, their voter card numbers were used as the registration key on the Novissi platform.

The platform delivered contactless, emergency cash transfers based on machine learning techniques and mobile money. To expand the coverage of the Novissi platform, the poorest villages and neighborhoods of Togo were identified through high-resolution satellite imagery and nationally representative household consumption data. Within those villages and neighborhoods, the poorest individuals were then prioritized for enrollment in the Novissi cash transfer platform through machine learning algorithms using mobile phone metadata and phone surveys.

As part of the cash transfer program, the Government decided to allocate more funds to women than men—CFA 12,250 for women versus CFA 10,500 for men. This was justified in recognition of the basic primary roles women and girls play in supporting households—in-home care for the sick and performing daily housekeeping type functions, including childcare, cooking, shopping for food, and cleaning. While women constituted 63 percent of the total beneficiaries of the program, monitoring done throughout the scheme’s implementation revealed that women, particularly those in rural areas, had lower access to digital terminals than men. Moreover, in many households, the only existing phone belonged to men, making it difficult or almost impossible for women to have direct access to the Novissi social assistance funds allocated to them.
Over three phases, in total, Novissi reached over 817,000 beneficiaries across Togo, of whom over 516,000, or 63 percent, were women. Novissi disbursed CFA 18.8 billion (USD 21 million) of financial aid (Novissi 2020). There are plans by the government to build on the Novissi experience and to integrate it into the Safety Nets and Basic Services Project. The cash transfer platform could represent a central building block in supporting the prioritization, delivery, and monitoring of social protection programs in Togo (World Bank 2021).

4.2. National Network of Women Farmers of Togo

Founded by a female agricultural entrepreneur, Bariétou Agbere, the Réseau National des Femmes Agricultrices du Togo (RENAFAT—National Network of Women Farmers of Togo) was established in 2012 to create women cooperatives that are engaged in value chain development for different agricultural products and to facilitate communication and information sharing among Togolese women farmers. In 2017, RENAFAT set up a processing unit for packaging parboiled rice, Riz la Grâce. REFANAT has 215 member unions, representing over 12,000 women (Lagbai 2017). It aims to promote the interests of women in Togo’s rural areas by providing access to production tools and technologies and other inputs, to information, and to training on production and processing methods and using agribusiness platforms. The aim of the network is to sustainably improve women farmers’ livelihoods by creating opportunities in agri-food processing and forestry and better organizing and structuring local agricultural and forestry producer organizations to meet the needs of women (FAO 2021).

RENAFAT has adopted a consultative and action-oriented approach to advance and safeguard the rights and well-being of women in rural areas. Between July 2021 and March 2022, RENEFAT participated in creating regional women’s colleges, organizing meetings and training programs on e-marketing, packaging and labeling, and promoting reforestation. In doing so, the network helped improve farmers’ livelihoods in ten agricultural organizations located across Togo, particularly by assisting those organization build their agri-entrepreneurship skills and better promote the economic value of their agricultural products (FAO 2021).

4.3. Togolese Women’s Entrepreneurs Federation

The Fédération des Entrepreneures et Femmes d’Affaires du Togo (FEFA—Togolese Women’s Entrepreneurship Federation) is a non-profit organization for Togolese women entrepreneurs and business owners. The Federation serves as a...
platform for strengthening the capacity of women in the private sector to contribute to the economic development of Togo. Regional economic integration is also a focus of its work, as it seeks to play a catalytic role in increasing the volume of national, intra-African, and global trade. It currently has 33 local women’s associations as members.

FEFA provides training and capacity-building programs for aspiring women entrepreneurs. One element of this is a business and entrepreneurship mentoring program—Innov’Up—that was initiated by FEFA in partnership with UNDP in 2016. Innov’Up supports women to bring their businesses to scale by equipping them with skills to succeed in the marketplace. As of 2021, more than 100 women-owned businesses had been incubated and assisted through the Innov’Up program, including many in agri-food processing. Of the 31 businesses currently listed on Innov’Up’s website, 20 are in the agri-food sector, with a primary focus on food processing. Examples include Yaourt BIS in dairy, Erater in food processing, and the Société Coopérative Dénygba Cacao, which focuses on processing cocoa into powder and butter (Innov’Up 2017).

4.4. Economic empowerment of rural women

Since 1987, the councils of the Grand Est region in France and that of the Centrale region in Togo have partnered in implementing a rural sustainable economic development project in the Central region of Togo that particularly focuses on the agriculture sector. Jointly, the regions implemented activities between 2016 and 2018 that led to the creation of agricultural cooperatives involving 165 women. These cooperatives are intended to empower the women by diversifying their agricultural production through the commercial cultivation of paddy rice and creating income-generating activities. Women were trained on the principles of how cooperatives operate, the techniques for setting up and developing rice nurseries, and the marketing and management of the revenues generated from the activities of the cooperatives. Currently, the cooperatives are cultivating four market gardens, and a processing facility for paddy rice has been established (Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires Étrangères 2018).

4.5. Women-focused project on quality and processing standards for agricultural products

Togo exports most of its agricultural raw materials, leaving little for local processing, despite surplus production of cereals since 2010 (Cruz, et al. 2019). Women dominate the food processing sub-sector, but their incomes could be significantly higher. The challenges of better integrating women into markets, including through the production of products that meet quality standards, must be addressed. In this context, Projet d’Appui aux Actions des Femmes en Matière du Respect des Normes de Qualité et de Transformation des Produits Agricoles (Project to Support Women’s Actions in Respecting Quality and Processing Standards for Agricultural Products), a project implemented by FAO and the Togolese Institute of Agricultural Research, sought to modernize women-run food processing units and improve food analysis laboratories for quality control and certification (RPCA 2021). The products included micronutrient-enriched flour; bread flour made from cassava, plantain, and sweet potato; teas; oils; butter; juices; and syrup (United Nations—Togo 2020).

Between 2015 and 2017, the project through training and event participation strengthened the capacities of 50 female agricultural entrepreneurs in hygiene, food manufacturing practices, marketing, and equipment operation. Testing equipment and training sessions were also provided to food laboratories under the project, making food certification more accessible to women. Samples of the food products from women participating in the project were analyzed, and certificates were issued. The availability of analytical resources and training has contributed to the advancement of food conformity assessment laboratories, increasing awareness and accessibility of food certification for women.

Techniques for processing and marketing locally processed agricultural products in five agri-food sectors were also inventoried under the project to create a guide for good manufacturing and processing practices. Two commercial fairs were held in which the women entrepreneurs exhibited and sold their processed agricultural products.
Subsequently, a designated area was established in Lomé where women can display and sell their domestically-processed goods (FAO 2017).

4.6. Restoration of forest landscapes through women’s groups

In Togo, rural women engage commercially in non-timber forest product value chains, like karité (shea butter), which primarily is used for cosmetic purposes, and néré (locust bean), which can be food for people and feed for livestock. Non-timber forest products are also used to make mats for household use and construction fiber and as fuel. Since 2020, the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and Soka Gakkai have partnered to support Togo’s forest landscape restoration by strengthening women’s roles and improving land security for women. Soka Gakkai has provided funding for a pilot project, Appui à des Groupements de Femmes pour la Restauration des Paysages Forestiers (Support for Women’s Groups in the Restoration of Forest Landscapes) in the prefectures of Blitta in Centrale region and Lacs in Maritime region. Implemented jointly with the African Women’s Network for Community Management of Forests, the project seeks to teach 100 women from seven local women’s groups how to operate tree nurseries, produce seedlings, plant trees, and practice agroforestry (ITTO 2020). Since the project’s inception in 2020, 30,000 native trees have been planted and are being monitored and cared for to ensure healthy growth (Lawson 2023). The project aligns with Togo’s National Adaptation Plan and Nationally Determined Contributions on climate change under the Paris Agreement (SGI 2021).

5. CONCLUSION

The Government of Togo has demonstrated a robust commitment to women’s economic and social development, resulting in increased participation by women in decision-making and leadership positions in public organizations and other sectors, including at the highest levels. In addition, the education and integration of women have been a focus in many development initiatives, with a specific emphasis on leveraging their knowledge and expertise in the processing of agro-food products and forestry. The government has made concerted efforts to enhance the agency and inclusion of women in processes of societal advancement by giving precedence to their knowledge, expertise, and perspectives.

Over the last decade, the country has pushed through a range of legal, policy, and institutional reforms designed to advance the agri-food sector and promote inclusive development. The government has implemented measures to augment the regulatory framework and facilitate the inclusion of women in both the business and the political spheres, thus engendering an increase in female representation within the government and the leadership of local communities. Moreover, there has been a proliferation of enterprises and a discernible surge in the proportion of female entrepreneurs, particularly within the agri-food domain. The Prime Minister’s initiative in 2021 of the Program of Excellence for Women in Africa is a promising initiative and, if brought to scale, can contribute to strengthening women’s agency in Togo’s food systems (ShARE 2020).

Consequently, Togo has emerged as an example for other African nations in promoting women’s inclusion and agency across a spectrum of developmental pursuits, explicitly emphasizing the agricultural and food sectors. The government has plans for additional reforms to tackle domestic violence and gender-based discrimination, among others. As Togo continues to advance women’s economic empowerment, it also must ensure that these efforts are aligned with those being taken to make food systems across Togo more sustainable, inclusive, dependable, safe, and healthy.
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