

Honourable Minister, fellow speakers, in the interests of time: all protocol observed,

I am delighted that you have invited me to be part of this Webinar, especially as the topic is directly linked to two important political priorities for the EU: gender equality and a 'farm to fork' vision for agricultural development.

As a point departure, I would make three observations. First, I would ask us all to spare a thought this morning for our sisters and daughters in Afghanistan who, after the events of the weekend, have no idea what their future holds; whether they can continue going to work, to study, to go to school.

My second observation is that South Africa and the EU are like-minded on the issues of gender equity and social inclusion. They are central to the work that we do, both within the EU - through the European Union Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 - as well as outside of the Union - through our third Gender Action Plan, 2021-2025.

In South Africa the EU Delegation, along with our Member States in a broader #TeamEurope approach, continues to work on this critical cross-cutting issue. Already, the EU funds a gender programme with the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities.

This programme supports the South African government's efforts to allocate resources on gender empowerment (gender budgeting) and to improve gender mainstreaming across government departments.

I am confident that it will address women in agriculture and benefit the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development: after all, women are central in the delivery of safe and nutritious food.

And my third observation: it goes without saying that overcoming hunger is central to our shared vision of a world, where no one is left behind.

The EU's 'farm-to-fork' strategy is our vision for agriculture and is at the heart of our efforts to make food systems fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly. It links closely with a post-Covid green recovery based on sustainability.

Farmers, agri-businesses, retailers and consumers are all key players in food and nutrition security, health, environmental sustainability, rural livelihoods and development.

Let me also point out that our food systems are interconnected: South Africa is a most successful exporter of agri-food products to the EU, with a positive trade balance of 6.6 billion Rand. In 2020, the growth in South Africa agricultural exports to the EU was almost double of that to the rest of the world. This means business for women farmers.

Minister, I believe there is much to discuss - in this regard allow me to place on record that your EU counterpart, Commissioner Wojciechowski, is looking forward to an exchange with you.

Looking ahead, with nine out of ten European consumers are ready to pay a fair price for healthy and tasty food, your products from citrus to rooibos to wine are well positioned in the European market. I note, therefore, how important it is to make the most of our strong trade relations.

Staying on the theme of working closely together, I am delighted that South Africa is one of the few partner countries with whom the EU has committed to work to prepare for next month's UN Food System Summit. Minister, in this regard, the EU, together with the FAO, has written to your office.

We acknowledge the work that you, Minister, have facilitated through the National Food Systems Dialogues and we look forward to President Ramaphosa's presentation at the Summit. Women, no doubt, will feature prominently: after all, statistics show that women, who control only about 5% of South Africa's land, provide 80% of agriculture labour. Also, about 70% of smallholders in South Africa are women.

Separately, the Centre of Excellence on Food Security, at the University of the Western Cape, I would add with EU funding, has identified critical challenges for South Africa. They include the double burden of under- and over- nutrition; gaps between sophisticated food policy and food security; understanding the constraints towards more sustainable agricultural practices; and how concentrations in food value-chains shape food systems outcomes.

These issues are relevant to women's empowerment and a gender equal society. We support the recent proposal of the Centre of Excellence to discuss these results with the Department.

We see the transformation of food systems as a major opportunity to accelerate our contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals. Our commitment to women in agriculture is already being translated into the EU's current financial cooperation with South Africa.

Let me bring a few examples:

- (i) The EU funded EDSE Programme is working with Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development on supporting and strengthening the small business ecosystem. The collaboration is also working to identify competitive strategic value chains for agribusiness SMMEs, so to ensure their increased participation in targeted value-chains as identified in the Agriculture and Agro-processing Master Plan.
- (ii) Small businesses, especially women-owned enterprises, experience several challenges in seeking to access markets—one of these is compliance with food safety requirements. We are working to improve SMMEs' compliance with food safety and quality requirements, particularly in value chains that have a high potential for growth and job creation.

- (iii) We also provide funding to SHETrades ZA, which supports women-owned enterprises (farmers or agroprocessors) to enter trade markets. In this respect, the EU Delegation was delighted to participate last week in the programme's efforts to present South African women owned businesses to the 'Organisation for Women in International Trade'.

This was a forum to highlight the opportunities offered by the Southern Africa/EU Economic Partnership Agreement; for instance the under-utilised trade preferences for South Africa's exports of canned fruit, butter, citrus jam, frozen strawberries, milk powder and bio-ethanol.

- (iv) Next week, I have the great pleasure of visiting Clanwilliam in the Western Cape to promote the Rooibos Geographical Indication (GI). We are very excited about this GI! I know the important role of women in this value chain, specific to South Africa.
- (v) Yet another important programme of ours supports the transformation of the Wines and Spirit sector, and targets in particular women entrepreneurs and previously disadvantaged farmers.

These are a few examples to illustrate the EU's core principle that women and girls are key agents of development, transformation and change. The EU is currently starting a new cycle of projects, and it has committed that Gender equality will be an explicit objective of at least 80% of all new projects.

Thank you once again for giving me an opportunity to participate in this important webinar. I was delighted to be joining an amazing line up of other speakers.

Honourable Minister, we have not had the opportunity to meet yet; as you could see the EU is very active under your portfolio, and I am looking forward the opportunity to exchange further with you.

Thank you.