Cream of the Crop:
How Women are Emerging as Entrepreneurial Leaders in Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America

Marlene Stearns

IGIS WP 09 / GGP WP 06
October 2013

Institute for Global and International Studies
1957 E Street NW, Suite 501
The Elliott School of International Affairs
The George Washington University
Washington, DC 20052
www.gwu.edu/~igis
Abstract

This collection of case studies compares the strategies used by ten women in eight sub-Saharan African and Latin American countries to successfully start an agri-business, finance growth, develop new sales, manage employees, manage familial responsibilities while running a business, and achieve industry leadership positions. Whereas many institutions have documented the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and farmers in low-income countries, little research has documented the strategies women business owners have successfully employed to surmount the obstacles to doing business in the traditionally, male managed, agriculture and agribusiness sectors. This collection of case studies aims to address that gap.

Marlene (Gummo) Stearns obtained her Masters of International Policy and Practice at the George Washington University in 2013 and completed her undergraduate work at The Pennsylvania State University. She has 12 years of experience leading economic growth and agricultural development initiatives, five of those living in West Africa. She’s managed over $16 million in international trade capacity building and agricultural programs and has designed, managed, implemented, and presented at over 55 food and trade industry events. She has been a key speaker on the U.S. food market, marketing strategy, trade based development, and U.S. regulatory requirements in five countries, including the U.S. She is a former Fulbright researcher of non-tariff barriers to trade that limited African agricultural and food businesses’ ability to take advantage of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). In 2013 she founded 3Psourcing: sustaining people, planet, profit to assist socially minded African and Latin American food companies to export their specialty foods to the U.S.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper would not exist if the successful women who provided interviews had not given generously of their time and experiences with me. My gratitude and admiration run deep for Sharon Againe, Susana Chavez Villalobos, Randa Filfili, Christina Kaba, Dinnah Kabiza, Mitslal Kifleyesus-Matschie, Catherine Krobo-Edusie, Monica Lozano Luque, Grace Mena, and Yiver Vargas. I also extend a hand of thank you to Maria Isabella Balbuena, President of the Dominican Republic’s IWCA for sharing her experiences as the director of a women’s coffee cooperative. Although this collection of case studies includes only entrepreneurs, Maria’s story sealed my desire to expand the next phase of this research to include “intra-preneurs” and CEOs of agricultural entities.

I primarily self-funded this research with travel support to Costa Rica provided by The George Washington University’s Global Gender Program, headed by Dr. Barbara Miller. Dr. Miller also provided constant guidance and encouragement for which I’m ever grateful.

Several people graciously provided interviewee recommendations, introductions, or coordination assistance. Thank you to Zukiswa Qutyelo, Rosario Mora, Kristal Barquero Villalobos, Tim Bergstrom, Sylvain Roy, Kristine Jiminéz, Takyi Sraha, Amber Breitenberg, Emily Schaffer, Ana Salinas, Cristina Keller, and Melissa Hand for sharing my enthusiasm and pointing me in the right direction.

Finally, thank you to my husband, Dylan, for helping with Spanish translations and for keeping our daughters entertained while I worked over many weekends. Although I sacrificed many a day playing at the park, it is my daughters who inspired me to identify positive female role models in agriculture in the first place. I hope that their favorite books will soon feature women and girl farmers like those featured in this collection of case studies.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The image of the voiceless peasant woman working in a field in the global South needs to be updated to portray the female farmer as one runs her own business, be it a commercial farm or food processing company. To inspire more women to recognize opportunities to improve their country’s food sector and to act on them sustainably, the peasant image needs to be updated to reflect the rising, professional woman in the agricultural and food industry. Future female entrepreneurs in food and agriculture will benefit from a reformed image and from this unique collection of case studies by learning from the successes and failures of those who women who have gone before them. They will be better equipped to visualize the success that can be achieved regardless of gender. But who are the female role models in agriculture we can look to for this inspiration?

For this research, I identified, qualified, and interviewed ten women who are entrepreneurial leaders and role models in their country’s agricultural and food sectors. Throughout this collection of qualitative case studies, I will share their stories from Africa and Latin America on how they conquered common barriers to success. Where there is a similar operating context, I will compare the success strategies employed by women in Africa with those used by women in Latin America and the Caribbean. The principal findings that will be explored in greater detail in this working paper are listed below.

Nearly:

- Each woman is driven by a personal mission to provide a healthier and more comfortable lifestyle for her family;
- Every woman works in the community where she resides; they are nationals, not diaspora. Those who were diaspora returned home before starting a business.
- All of the married women confirmed the moral support of their husbands and have hired help to care for their families and domestic duties;
- Each possesses agricultural and business education, operates legally, and values certifications for improved credibility.
- Every woman is circumventing gender barriers and is thus leading by example;
- All of the Women Entrepreneurial Leaders in Agriculture (WELAs) are succeeding in niche, agricultural sectors and markets;
- Every business owner used her own funds to start her business;
- Every woman is using a portfolio of resources to grow her business;
- Every WELA values her professional network as a strategy for business development and each values mentorship when the relationship developed organically.

It is my hope to foster the growth and publicity of this research project to include a greater number of WELAs, including corporate “intra-preneurs” and cooperative leaders and to provide a greater in-depth analysis of the agricultural business and policy environments in each country in order to place opportunities for women’s emerging entrepreneurial leadership in agriculture in a wider context. I hope that this collection of case studies serves to increase public visibility of each woman’s personal and professional success and to modernize the public image of the “female farmer.” Finally, I hope that it stimulates institutional funding and interest in conducting detailed studies on women’s entrepreneurial activities – specifically in agriculture and agribusiness – that would be useful to
researchers, policy makers, international development advisers, and to current and future women in agriculture and agribusiness advocating for a more favorable business environment in the agricultural sector.
INTRODUCTION

In 2010 women from the agricultural sectors of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean met in Rome at IFAD’s Farmers’ Forum. The forum is a meeting between IFAD staff, farmers’ organizations, and governments to discuss policies, programs, and operations sponsored by IFAD to reduce poverty among the developing world’s rural poor. During this third session, participants talked about how to promote women’s leadership in farmers’ and rural producers’ organizations. They agreed on several important recommendations to improve women’s leadership in agriculture. One key recommendation was the need for “more positive media messages and portrayals of women,” notably “a need for the professionalization of the image of the female farmer, including the young woman farmer.” (IFAD 2010: 9).

Not only does the image of the female farmer, who performs an estimated 70-80% of all agricultural labor in the world, (FAO) need to be polished, but the image of women working further down the value chain, in food distribution, processing, and marketing needs to be promoted equally. Women produce food, buy it, and prepare it for their families. Yet men make the majority of the decisions about what varieties to plant, how to grow it, which inputs to use, when to sell it, and the quantity to sell or store. Women working in the fields and those with a commercial eye toward agribusiness need to see positive images of women already making a profitable living in agriculture. They need role models for inspiration and motivation, but they also will greatly benefit from learning the stories of successes and failures of those who’ve gone before them.

Temra Costa captured the importance of women’s emergence in agricultural decision making for her book, Farmer Jane: “It’s about the impact that femininity has in changing businesses for the better. Women lean towards relationships and long-term strategies that prioritize future generations and the good news is that this viewpoint is starting to become valued in the emerging green economy. It’s all about systems thinking and perspectives of what the new (triple) bottom line should be – that of environment, people, and prosperity (health, and economic). Beyond their role in shifting business, women are raising the next generation of leaders, of farmers, of gardeners, of aware human beings that will care for this place long after we’re gone.” (Costa 2013).

I embarked on this research project to draw public attention to the need to improve the image of the female farmer and agribusiness entrepreneur. Throughout this paper, I will share the stories of ten successful women in agriculture in Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The women featured in this paper have become leaders in their communities as a result of providing higher quality foods through safer food production, longer shelf-lives through processing, and jobs and incomes in their communities where they are most needed.

I hope this paper plants a seed that will increase public attention on what is working in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America to allow women to emerge as heads of industry in the traditionally, male managed, agricultural and food sectors. I hope that women working in agriculture will read or hear about this collection of case studies and be inspired by some of the strategies shared. Likewise, I hope that business and international agricultural development industry practitioners will read it and share it as a means to grow public awareness of women leaders in agriculture.

Little data is available on the number or percentages of women leaders in agribusiness across Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. Although numerous institutions such as the World Bank, IFAD, FAO, and USAID have studied the importance of women in agricultural development, there are few publications and media outlets dedicated to recognizing the women who have succeeded as leading entrepreneurs in the agricultural industry in spite of the challenges.

In this paper, I will focus on how leading women entrepreneurs are surmounting the challenges they face. Some of the challenges are not specific to women. Identifying growth capital is an obstacle faced
by male-owned business as well as female owned businesses. However, women are much more likely to have a more negative experience when applying for a loan or investment to expand than men in many countries. Consequently, women tend to be more creative in order to successfully surmount this challenge. In general, women in lesser developed economies need to be more resourceful and resilient to emerge as business leaders—especially working in rural areas where gender based, cultural stigmas and social responsibilities are often greater. In the stories of ten outstanding women featured here, I hope to communicate their collective belief that anything is possible, to inspire more women to think about agriculture and food from a business mentality, and to remind women in agriculture that they are part of a global movement for greater female leadership in agricultural production and distribution.

**METHODODOLOGY**

The methodology used for this research was driven by both deductive and inductive logic informing a comparative approach to analyzing ten case studies of women entrepreneurial leaders in agriculture. Multiple case studies were selected across three geographic regions. Although I pre-developed demographic, primary codes and prepared questions for semi-structured interviews, I allowed the interviewees to lead the conversation and I freely asked new questions relevant to each interviewee’s own experience. After I wrote up all of the case studies, I analyzed them for replication of insights and contrasting situations.

Initially, I identified thirty potential candidates by tapping into my own professional network comprised mostly of agricultural development industry professionals, contacting well known agricultural universities and institutions, and reviewing industry and association websites and reports. After interviewing the first two entrepreneurs, it was apparent that a “deeper dive” into the stories of a fewer number of participants would add more value to ongoing dialogue about women’s agricultural entrepreneurship than to conduct a larger number of interviews on a more superficial basis. I modified the scope of my research and narrowed in on the top ten Women Entrepreneurial Leaders in Agriculture, or WELAs as I call them for the sake of brevity, on my list based on the following criteria:

- Woman owned Small and Medium sized Enterprise (SME) in the agricultural sector
- Based in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, or the Caribbean
- Have been publicly recognized for their achievements

The ten women profiled hail from six countries in Africa (Ethiopia, Malawi, Uganda, Senegal, South Africa, and Ghana) and two countries in the Latin America & Caribbean region (Colombia and Costa Rica). Nine of the women own for-profit businesses. One woman out of the ten runs a non-profit, albeit she runs it like a business. Their array of expertise spans fruits, vegetables, coffee, food processing, trade, distribution, marketing and advisory services, agricultural media, and farm supply.

Of the selected participants, five were introduced to me through my personal contacts, three were recommended as emerging leaders by the Earth Institute of Costa Rica’s Alumni department, and three were recognized in official leadership positions of the International Women’s Coffee Association (IWCA). For a complete list of interviewees, please see Appendix B.

For the participants based in Costa Rica, I conducted in-person interviews. For all others, I conducted the primary interviews and a series of follow-up interviews via Skype, telephone, and email. Prior to the primary interview, I provided each candidate with the research protocol, consent form, and semi-
structured, general questionnaire (see Appendices C and D). I also emailed two online surveys of ten questions each to every participant to collect basic demographic information on the entrepreneur and her business. Interviews were conducted in English, Spanish, and French as necessary, and all protocols, consent forms, questionnaires, and online surveys were prepared and provided in all three languages.

I referred to hand-written notes, emails, and digital recordings captured during the interviews in order to craft each entrepreneur’s narrative into a case study. I filled in contextual information by using both online and offline research from company websites, TED Talks, industry associations, sector and institutional reports, country newspapers, and in some cases, partners’ or employees’ blogs. Whereas my primary goal was not to triangulate the interviewees’ responses, this secondary verification approach served to better contextualize responses.

I used a combination of pre-developed primary codes to sort participants based on personal and business demographic information. This selection allowed me to create a semi-structured questionnaire and to ensure a more diverse set of responses from successful women entrepreneurs in agricultural at various stages of their lives and business development. I took a grounded theory approach to generate core concepts linking the ten case studies and allowing the secondary codes to surface during the coding process after all of the case studies had been written up. I favored this approach to avoid overlooking an important concept that may have informed the angle of my original research or that may have led my research in a new direction.

The primary categories of codes were: Personal Demographics, Business Characteristics, Success Factors, Character Profiles, Challenges Acknowledged, Leadership Positions, Awards, & Events, and Support for Future Girls in Agri-business. Within Personal Demographics, the codes denoted age, education level, country of higher education, pre-entrepreneurial career, marriage status, number and ages of children, socio-economic level, home location city and country, and business location city and country. Business Characteristics included the business name, year established, type, size, agricultural approach (conventional, organic, etc.), annual revenues in 2011 or ‘12, supplier credit provision, legal status, number of employees, number of female employees, percentage of women in management positions, home based, method for acquiring start-up capital, and method for acquiring expansion capital.

The secondary codes within Success Factors documented entrepreneurs’ access to capital, credit, and financing, level of land and asset ownership rights, social capital and network, membership in cooperatives, associations, and women’s only organizations, benefit from domestic programs, benefit from international (donor-sponsored) programs, relevance of personal mentors and/or role models, personal driving force, industry certifications, integration of family into business activities, employment of household help, greatest innovation, greatest failure, lesson learned from greatest failure, greatest challenge with solution, and participation in agricultural, business, or leadership training.

The Character Profile secondary codes were formed entirely on grounded theory. They emerged as a result of an open ended question to describe oneself in five words or less, as well as through direct observation over the series of interviews and follow-ups. They include: optimistic, pragmatic, tenacious, positive, belief in deeper significance of work, confident, healthy, having a supportive family, and technologically adept. The secondary codes under Challenges Acknowledged were pre-developed and included: gender norms, domestic responsibilities, cultural norms, ethnic norms, employee relations,
access to materials, and access to financing. The last two primary codes, Leadership Positions, Awards, & Events, and Support for Future Girls in Agribusiness were pre-developed and do not contain secondary codes.

There are two principal limitations to the depth of my methodological approach and analysis. The first underlies the very necessity of this research: there is a significant lack of publicly recognized Women Entrepreneurial Leaders in Agriculture (WELAs) in sub-Saharan African, Latin American, and Caribbean countries. My original intent was to interview at least 35 WELAs operating in a more concentrated selection of countries. I interviewed only ten WELAs in part due to my need to complete my degree program within a given timeframe and in part due to the lengthy amount of time it took to identify participants. Had I more time, I would have been able to identify more WELAs per country and interview a greater number of entrepreneurs. The result of the time limitation is the wide-cast geographic project scope. Yet the amount of time it takes to identify WELAs itself symptomatic of the larger, double sided issue: WELAs are few and far between and there isn’t enough public recognition or media coverage of those who do exist to make them easily identifiable.

The wide-cast geographic scope made it difficult in the time available for this research to include thorough assessment of the policy and business environments in each of the eight countries of the participants. Although there are materials available (USAID AgClir and BizClir assessments, World Bank doing business indicators, the Economist’s first Women Entrepreneurial Venture Scope report, IFPRI’s WEAI, some country government household surveys online, etc.), there wasn’t enough time to review all of these single-handedly and analyze them in the context of the WELAs remarks for inclusion in this paper.

The second limitation was a common one that I hope to improve in order to continue this research: limited budget. I conducted face-to-face interviews only in Colombia and Costa Rica. With greater funding, I would have been able to conduct more on-site, face to face, interviews with all of the WELAs as well as hire an assistant to help with scheduling and research. A greater quantity of on-site interviews would have allowed for greater inclusion of direct observational methods, triangulation, and interviews with local agricultural experts.

**FINDINGS**

Compared to the world’s other continents, sub-Saharan Africa boasts one of the highest rates of women’s engagement in entrepreneurial activity in the world. The Global Entrepreneur Monitor 2012 Women’s Report confirmed that 27% of sub-Saharan African women are engaged in entrepreneurial activities. Latin American and Caribbean women weren’t far behind, with 15% of their female population engaged in entrepreneurial activities. The numbers are not high, but in sub-Saharan Africa, they are nearly on par with men’s rates of entrepreneurial activity in many countries. This is impressive given the extra responsibilities women hold in most cultures, as well as the cultural and institutional discrimination many of them face when starting a business.

The women I’ve interviewed for this study have confirmed such challenges, and shared their strategies for overcoming them. They’ve shared their failures and lessons learned when starting a business in the agricultural sector. Between two vastly different continental regions of sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, and the Caribbean, many of the women experienced similar challenges to
some degree regardless of her age, business size, or business type. All of them displayed creativity and innovation on a daily basis to problem-solve in order to succeed.

Throughout the following pages, I will explore each of the principal findings in greater detail. The principal findings are: every woman described a personal mission to provide a healthier and more comfortable lifestyle for her family; every woman works in the community where she resides; all of the married women confirmed the moral support of their husbands; every woman is leading by example and rising by circumventing gender barriers; all of the WELAs are succeeding in niche, agricultural sectors; every business owner secured her own funds to start the business; every woman is using a portfolio of resources to grow her business. Finally, every WELA valued her professional network as a strategy to develop new sales and each valued mentorship when the mentor-mentee relationship developed organically.

Each woman is working to improve her family’s and her country’s quality of life.

In 2011, The South African Women Entrepreneur’s Network’s (SAWEN) reported in its study, Women Entrepreneurs in South Africa, that a “strong motivating factor for women entrepreneurs was helping others,” and “that goals other than economic growth guide a woman’s business.” At the same time, South Africa’s Centre for Entrepreneurship at the Wits Business School published a white paper on Female Entrepreneurship that contrasted, “it is untrue that women were not natural entrepreneurs and only started a business because they had to or to do good. The research showed that most women are choosing to start a business even though they have other options.” (Boucher: 2011).

The WELAs featured in this paper embody not one of these findings, but all of them. They have strong motivating factors behind their business for helping others, are guided by goals other than pure economic growth, are natural entrepreneurs, and chose to start a business even though they had other options. Like entrepreneurs worldwide, each WELA recognized an opportunity that would improve her country’s access to food security as well as her own financial security, and then confidently acted on it. There are many opportunities where business endeavors will improve a social cause and given their traditional social responsibilities, it is not surprising that women are electing to channel their entrepreneurial energies to starting businesses that improve social problems—such as an improved food security.

Dinnah Kapiza, a Malawian grandmother and retired school teacher, lost her husband and became responsible for feeding ten children and grandchildren in her household. She felt desperate. She started a small sewing business but thieves broke into her shop and stole everything. “Then I worked for an NGO as an Orphans and Vulnerable Children Specialist,” she says. “That’s where I saw how widows suffered to access farm inputs since they had little or
no money to buy even a kilogram of fertilizer and seed. In my area there was no shop selling inputs so I capitalized on that. I started with mk20000.00 (about $133) which I saved from my salary.” She signed up for a series of agricultural business workshops that made her eligible to purchase farm inputs at a larger, urban supplier on credit, partially guaranteed by a program sponsored by the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA). “This gave me a push and that’s how my business grew from one shop to four. When I see widows’ livelihoods improving and my business growing, it gives me energy to work even harder.” Thanks to her choice to start her own business distributing farm inputs, Dinnah is now able to support her family, employ some of her older children, and help other widows to ensure their own livelihoods through farming. In spite of electing to become an entrepreneur later in life, she now owns four input supply stores and in 2011, earned an estimated $100,000 in sales revenue in a country where the average national income is $870 (WHO 2013). In 2011 Dinnah was named Malawi’s Agribusiness Entrepreneur of the Year.

Christina Kaba is a grandmother in South Africa who made a similar choice, emerging as an entrepreneur while leading a non-profit organization. She is also the sole provider for family members and grandchildren living in her home. Mama Kaba, as she is popularly referred to in Cape Province, teaches some of the world’s poorest people to grow their own food and assure their own livelihood. “Uneducated people have a lot of challenges,” she says. “They can’t read or write. But they can grow food.”

“Everything I learned I learned on the farm land,” she recalls. Christina was pulled out of secondary school when she was 15 years old to help her parents work on their small, subsistence farm. She never went back to school. “One day a lady arrived to see my garden. She said I need to organize the other women on my street and to teach them what I was doing. So we started a garden on my street.” The woman was from an organization called, Farm in the City – later to be renamed as Abalimi, which means “The Planters” in the local language of Xhosa. “She asked me to work for them and brought a form for me to sign. I signed the form and I got the job!”

Today, Christina Kaba is Abalimi’s Operations Manager and Founder of Harvest of Hope, an urban community gardens driven Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) business in Cape Town, South Africa. She has come farther than she humbly admits. She was named South Africa’s Woman of the Year in 2001 and a City of Cape Town Khayelitsha Achiever for Community Development. As Operations Manager of Abalimi, a grassroots, urban farming organization, her projects such as the Manyanani Peace Park have also attracted dozens of awards, including The Green Trust-WWF Environmental Award in 1995, the President’s Social Forestry Award in 1996, Abalimi 2013, the Impumelelo Gold Sustainability Award of 2010 and a SAB Entrepreneur Leadership Award in 2011. (TedxPrince Albert).

Cristina possesses determination to improve the lives of the poor, confidence in her skills, and a common sense approach. Over twenty years, she’s acquired her business skills on-the-job. In 2008, she launched a Community Supported Agricultural (CSA) initiative in the Cape Flats area called Harvest of Hope with financial backing from the South African Institute of Entrepreneurship (SAIE), The Business Place Philippi, and supported by the Ackerman Pick n’ Pay Foundation.
In 2012, with an estimated annual budget of 1m rand (nearly $100,000), 10 employees, 3000 micro-lot gardeners, and 400 CSA customers, the small non-profit continues to grow. “By April 2013 we need to make 600 boxes for Harvest of Hope CSA,” she explained. “Running the project has to be like running a business.” She shared her business strategy for building new sales, “We visit schools. We give pamphlets to the children. The next day, we bring a box of vegetables to show the children. Then we ask them, ‘Will you talk to your mother and tell her you want a box of fresh vegetables?’ It works. When the mothers come to fetch their children, we’re there. Our marketing lady takes members’ registration information. She emails them and she invites them to visit the farms where their vegetables were grown so they can meet the farmers.”

To increase production to meet their growing demand, they are training more youth. The government will support the expansion with subsidies to the new gardeners for six months. During that time they will receive intense agricultural and business training, so they can continue after the subsidies stop. Although Abalimi chose Christina in the beginning, over the past decades, she has chosen it, as well as to harness her entrepreneurial energies to launch Harvest for Hope. “Meaning is a defining trait among successful leaders,” writes Joanna Barsh and Susie Cranston in How Remarkable Women Lead. “Meaning is a precursor to success because, psychologists say, recognizing and making it part of your life produces a sustained increase in happiness. Happiness is not just a nice-to-have-goal. Emotional and psychological well-being are critically important to leadership for four very practical reasons: Happiness is motivating; Happier teams are more creative; Leaders who exude happiness are more effective; and Happiness improves physical health as well as stamina and resilience.” (2011:22-24).

WELAs are driven by meaning as well as economic need. They combine their ability to provide a sustainable livelihood for their families with their ability to use business to make a long-lasting, positive impact in their communities. And they love what they do. Each woman is immersed in her location of business.

In her book, Vital Voices, Alyse Nelson writes of women leaders she has met while working for the U.S. State Department, “They believed in their societies’ potential. These women also possessed common strengths that have become integral to Vital Voices’ understanding of women’s leadership; strengths including the ability to develop strong roots in their communities, to empathize with others who live there, and to lead laterally, from within.” She continued, “In our experience, those who lead from within root their aspirations in the community and seek power to empower others. They are most successful when they are able to stay grounded in the needs of their communities, even as they gain greater exposure themselves, and to ensure that they are responding to their communities’ interests and bringing other people along.” (2012:47-48).

True to this observation, each WELA is based in her own country and immersed in the communities where she works. Exporters Grace Mena and Randa Filfili source their foods in their home territories where they live. They know the farmers who supply them; Yiver Vargas and Cristina Kaba never strayed far from home. Although Catherine Krobo-Edusie, Mitslal Kifleyesus-Matschie, Monica Luzano, and Sharon Againe all attended foreign universities and worked abroad, they all returned home
before they identified their meaning and niche markets in their own countries. All of the women are
great examples of the courage it takes to make a difference, whether it means staying grounded in your
community, or returning to in the face of seemingly more prosperous options.

During our interview, Mitslal, Founder of Ecopia PLC, an organic fruit and vegetable processing
company in Ethiopia, recalled the philosophy that led her from her career at the UN to entrepreneurship
in Ethiopia. “As a student I always said that Ethiopia needed people to do things, not people to tell
Ethiopians how to do it. To solve problems and to gain the confidence of a community, you have to fail
together with the farmers, and organically, develop a solution together.” Her strong belief that social
solutions to poverty do not come from external sources or from top down programs led her to relocate
with her children to Ethiopia while her husband continued to fulfill his duties as a public servant in
Germany.

Monica and Sharon are both younger in their entrepreneurial journeys than some of the other
WELAs. Each left her home in Colombia and Uganda, respectively, to learn sustainable agricultural
management at Costa Rica’s renowned Earth Institute. Monica, founder of Sea Soil, S.A. Colombia,
knew she would return to Colombia to apply organic agricultural practices to her family’s guanabana
farm. Sharon, Founder of Agasha Business Network, LLC in Uganda, always knew she would be an
entrepreneur. She grew up watching her uncle import general merchandise from India to sell it in
Uganda. “He never earned a salary at the end of the month. I first learned about salaries at the end of
the month when I went to college!”

“I didn’t want to work for anyone else. After two months in a factory, I was convinced that I
can’t be employed. So, I couldn’t stay in Europe or America. I had to choose.” Sharon confided that she
went to university always expecting she would apply her skills to improving her country’s outlook.
However, she also returned in order to find her uncle, who had mysteriously disappeared three months
before he was supposed to attend her graduation in Costa Rica.

Facing few educational opportunities in her early life, Cristina has remained immersed in her
community. “I ask why my mum died before she saw me with a house in the big city, with skills. I’m on
TV... I’m driving! We were so poor. We didn’t have any money. That’s why I know to work with poor
people,” she said. As one of her first tasks, Christina opened a new center for urban agriculture and
environmental action in Khayelitsha. She advised the people in the community how to use compost and
to plant vegetables. “I grow from there. I hired two people to help me. And I didn’t know anything about
driving a car. I needed to learn. The guys showed me a parking lot. The people there wanted me to
leave,” she laughed. “But because God is there, I learned.” Behind the wheel, her mobility increased
and she was able to get out into the areas more.

During her first five years, she worked only with women to build and foster home gardens.
South Africa was still heavily segregated under its apartheid policy of apartheid. “Before 1994, we were
not allowed to sit at the table. After ‘94 everything opened.” After 1994, she started working in new
areas of Cape Province. She organized 15 groups of women, then approached the municipality and got a
piece of land for them to plant on. “By 1997, nobody controlled me. We started new projects. We went
to the schools. Then in 1998, we started to think about our work as a business. We told people how they
could get money from vegetables. We got young women, old women – they were there. Because every
month somebody is making 4,000 rand (~$400), 6,000 rand (~$600), or 2,000 (~$200) rand, people see
the money in the banks. Then the old ladies start to employ young people to do the labor, to plant, to go to the market. The community is proud because of the salary we’re earning. And I grow. We set up in schools. We built a park with a swimming pool next to a community garden. Now women are motivated. Each and every day brings new projects.”

The term, “leadership” has seen many definitions. In 2010, Harvard Business School laid out a new communal definition of leadership: “Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence and making sure that impact lasts in your absence.” (Sandberg 2013: 157). Each of the WELAs are indeed driving positive changes in the communities where they work, where they source foods, and in their market driven requests for how the foods are produced. Not only are their fellow citizens better off, but so is the health of the land and water in the food producing regions which will be needed to feed future generations.

Every woman considers her husband and family to be morally supportive.

Every interviewee recognized her domestic and cultural responsibilities as well as the challenge of managing their time to serve their families as well as nurture their enterprises and ambitions. The majority of the WELAs are married with children. As mentioned earlier, some also care for grandchildren and extended family members. To help free time from domestic responsibilities of cooking, cleaning, and childcare, every WELA on both continents employed household help to manage those responsibilities. This is an advantage to living and working in lesser developed economies where labor is relatively inexpensive. In many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, household help is also considered a means to share income with those in need of a job and income. Of most families at most income levels, it is expected.

All of the married women cited their husbands as morally supportive to their endeavors outside of the home. Almost all of the WELAs had children of school age. Susana Villalobos-Chavez, Randa Filfili, Dinnah Kapiza and Christina Kaba are successfully building or expanding their businesses even with younger children in their homes. “Many times, my work is in other countries or in remote areas,” Susana said, referring to her work with Central American and Caribbean rural producers. She founded IBS Soluciones in Costa Rica. “Before, I had to leave my toddler with others and that wasn’t easy. But now my son is six and attends full time elementary school. I have eight straight hours to work. I’ve hired someone to help me with daily house work and I must keep a very scheduled day to maintain all of my roles.” She also enjoys working from her home office. “One of the advantages I have is that working from home, I am present most of time and I can monitor household management and child care.”

For the rest of the women with slightly older children, they all eschewed the notion of “work-life balance”. Instead they advocated the benefits of integrating their children into their work. Mitslal explained how being a woman with children can be an advantage when working with rural farmers. “A woman will spend time with the farmers actually doing most of the labor – the women. She will be able to interact with the children, understand the many interruptions in a woman’s work day, and work

1 Three women I interviewed do not have children and two women are single.
alongside the farmer in solidarity – the sole difference being the knowledge and opportunities she possesses that she is there to share.”

Mitslal told me of her experience extending an invitation to Ethiopia’s Minister of Agriculture for a business meeting to be held at her home. He refused to meet in her home because he knew her children would be there. This experience and others like it leads her to distinguish her success strategy from that of a man’s, “Men succeed by having focused, one-on-one time with partners and clients. Women succeed in business when they successfully integrate their work with their domestic responsibilities. There isn’t a line between them for many women. In Addis Abeba, I involve my kids in my company. My kids have learned to calculate pricing. My son is proud when he gives me ideas for the company.”

In her book, Lean In, Sheryl Sandberg considered the conundrum of “work-life balance” by questioning, “Framing the issue as “work-life balance” – as if the two were diametrically opposed – practically ensures work will lose out. Who would ever choose work over life?” (Sandberg 23). She continues to advocate, “We need more portrayals of women as competent professionals and happy mothers – or even happy professionals and competent mothers. The current negative images may make us laugh, but they also make women unnecessarily fearful by presenting life’s challenges as unsurmountable.” (Sandberg 24).

Catherine Krobo-Edusi, Founder and CEO of Eden Tree, Ltd, a fresh fruit and vegetable supplier in Ghana, described one symptom of her success to be less time to spend with her children while simultaneously managing her business. She had divorced from her husband and was raising her children as a single mother. She relied heavily on a caring, elderly woman to manage her home. “She was the mom. I became the father,” jokes Catherine. “I had to make time. No matter what, I said, I’ll be the one to take them to school in the morning. That was our time together. In traffic we talked.”

Twelve years after Catherine set up Eden Tree, she is proud that she could support her children to attend universities in the UK and the US. “They’ve grown up and turned out well!” she laughs. Her son is even considering returning to Accra to work with her at Eden Tree after he graduates. At this ideal prospect, she is cautiously optimistic, “I also realize he may not want to do it when the time comes. The business will be managed with shares, but he and my daughter will be on the board as the majority shareholders.” In spite of not planning to retire for a long time, she advised, “You have to put these things into place because you never know.”

**Successful women gain confidence from establishing their industry knowledge, learning business management skills, earning certifications and operating legally.**

All WELAs are educated in their industry’s knowledge and each values business management skills and operating legally in the formal sector. Not every woman earned her education in a formal environment however. Some learned on the job, through experimentation, or in agricultural workshops. Several women attended university level agricultural programs. The most successful women have supplemented their agricultural expertise with business management skills acquired at a university or workshop. Complementing education, every woman relies on her creativity and resourcefulness to surmount challenges—even the very challenge of accessing formal education.

To build a profitable, sustainable agricultural business, many interviewees advised that farmers need to look at their work from a business perspective. Catherine received her business training as a
business administration student in the UK. Soon after returning to Accra with her young family, she realized that the produce she was buying for her children in Accra’s open-air markets wasn’t safe. Many farmers use waste-water in their cultivation, which causes parasites and other bacteria to form on the produce. Alternatively, the fruits and vegetables available in supermarkets were imported and expensive. Like any natural entrepreneur, she recognized an opportunity. “My background isn’t agriculture. But there was a need,” she explained. “I grabbed it. I started with two people – my staff helping me regularly at home. I was in the right place at the right time,” she mused, “It was divine-led.”

She tested her budding agricultural skills on an acre of untended land owned by her sister-in-law on the outskirts of Ghana. She planted herbs and when they grew, she realized that she could be a farmer. She negotiated a modest lease with her in-laws to use the rest of their dormant nine acres. Then she purchased some tools and ordered high quality seeds through her sister-in-law, who was still living in the UK. Two hundred British pounds later, Eden Tree, Ltd. was born.

Today, Eden Tree manages its own farms, sanitation facility, distribution, and a restaurant (that uses Eden Tree’s non-supermarket grade produce), but it sources fresh fruits and vegetables from over 70 Eden Tree-trained outgrowers – of which she notes, only one is a woman. The FAO reports that in most developing country regions, women who are employed are just as likely, or even more likely, than men to work in agriculture. However, in most countries women are more likely than men to be employed seasonally, and rural wage-earning women are more likely than men to hold low-wage jobs (FAO). Some critics would argue that women do not act on their ambition, or know how to transition from fieldwork or subsistence farming to to starting their own commercial farm or agribusiness.

“Women look at field work to put food on the table and pay school fees. They don’t have business skills,” Catherine offered as an explanation on why only one of her outgrowers is female. Comparing the back-breaking labor required of agriculture to that required of the construction labor, she guessed that educated women aren’t attracted to it. “Ghana has strong heat and sun and even educated men want to work in an office, not a field. But women shouldn’t look at commercial farming as a man’s job,” she said. Whereas women conduct 70-80% of the world’s agricultural labor, research has shown that women do not typically view food production as a valued, commercial undertaking. (FAO). The FAO also reports in its gender findings on its website that “women are less likely than men to define their activities as work, and they are less likely to report themselves as being engaged in agriculture”

Catherine attributes her foreign education and resulting confidence level along with a strong motivation to provide healthy food for her children as the distinguishing factor for her success in commercial farming in Ghana. Having never worked on a farm, she didn’t need to evolve her perspective from being the farm labor to managing the farm.

Mitslal used her doctoral level education and fruit processing skills, to train future quality control managers before they graduate from university in Addis Ababa. She will also soon launch Ecopia’s scholarship program to formally tie new graduates to Ecopia’s quality management positions in the countryside where the fruit processing takes place.

Mitslal earned her PhD in arms control and disarmament policy in Germany, but learned how to preserve fruits and vegetables by experimenting with traditional Thuringian (a German region) recipes. During her TED talk in 2012 in Addis Ababa, Mitslal related what drove her to action. “I hate two things.
The first is war. The second is poverty.” Having spent a decade working to successfully minimize the former, she decided to attack the latter in her home country.

In 2008, she began teaching farmers in Ethiopia to grow and process organic produce. During this period, she managed the project’s resources and staff in Ethiopia, and moved Ecopia’s processing from Addis to seven rural fruit producing regions. She had help from a full time staff of 34 employees as well as two German interns responsible for sales and marketing.

Two award-winning agricultural start-up founders, Susana Villalobos Chaves of Costa Rica and Sharon Againe of Uganda both attended the Earth Institute in Costa Rica for their undergraduate studies in agricultural engineering. The Institute trains future agronomists and engineers in organic, biodynamic, and conservation agricultural practices. Many graduates launch their own commercial advisory firms, farms and ranches, or green technology companies.

After graduating and interning with beekeepers in Mozambique, Sharon returned to Uganda where she received business training sponsored by the BidNetwork program. She prepared a business plan for Uganda’s first online, business directory. In 2011, she was awarded 15,000 Euros in start-up capital from the prestigious Africa Orange Social Venture Prize. Due to “brain drain” in Kampala—a problem that plagues many African countries—she found it difficult to use local talent in Kampala to build a customized site to fulfill her vision. She ended up coordinating a long chain of outsourced IT labor between California, Brazil, and the Philippines. After a long year of global conference calls and emails, the site builders didn’t allow for interaction between the website and SMS, which is what farmers typically use on their cell phones. Consequently, it was slow to catch on.

By the website’s launch, Sharon realized that she would need to find a different way to stay afloat. “I began to focus on my strengths. I was consulting for pocket money that would then go back into the business.” In 2012 Sharon formed Agasha Business Group as a limited liability company to streamline and minimize her tax payments. This allowed her to integrate her freelance agricultural consulting services into Agasha Business Network, her agricultural media firm. “I needed to work less dates on consulting to have more time to work on Agasha’s strategy. Before I pulled my consulting into Agasha, I was earning $100/day. Then, I increased my rate to $270/day.” By recognizing the value of her work, she was able to spend less time consulting, earn similar revenue, but have more time developing a new strategy for Agasha.

In 2012 she received another entrepreneurial award from the Agribusiness Initiative Trust to develop a paper agribusiness directory. Sharon recalled, “Ugandans like printed directories, calling on phones. Online is expensive and isn’t fully developed here, yet. I started out covering everything. In 2013 I said, let me focus more on agribusiness and agriculture.” This was a smart move that allowed Agasha to fully benefit from Sharon’s agricultural training. She printed an initial 1,000 copies of the Agasha Agribusiness Directory and within three months ordered more. Unlike her competitors, she charged $4 per directory, and sometimes offered a 50% sale. “At trade shows, people put anything on the table. They don’t know if will ever be read. I decided to charge. Let them see the value. When they take it home, they’ll use it.” The other
differentiating factor of her directory is that it included small, hard to reach farmers, cooperatives, and SMEs. Competing directories only include large corporations and companies.

“It’s expensive to reach the farmers. You have to have a team, partner with local organizations, travel far to small villages,” Sharon explained. Not surprisingly, 90% of her directory revenues stem from advertising. “In Uganda, agriculture is heavily sponsored by international organizations, like the European Union and USAID. So by including smaller villages businesses, there are more opportunities for sponsorship (advertising). I’m not looking for grants though. As an entrepreneur, I don’t have time to do the reports required for grants.”

With the revenues earned from the paper Agribusiness Directory, Agasha developed a Coffee Sector Directory. Sharon’s savvy business strategy is paying off. In 2013 she spent more time working on the media arm than the consultancy and was able to earn a modest, yet respectable income. Her next step is to develop a wider range of products. She is currently at work on a DVD and an agricultural focused magazine.

She is sure that she will grow although perhaps more slowly than some other Ugandan business. Sharon insists on operating legally, which she believes will ultimately reduce the number of large customers she will secure. She explained, Corruption is of the highest order in Uganda. You have to construct costs. At the time of annual taxes, your accountant can justify the cost.

However, Sharon confided that she can’t accept corruption as a normal part of business. She had a $20,000 advertising contract she lost because she refused to kick back 40%. “I eliminated some business. Everyone knows what is going on. Nobody is going to do anything. Dealing with corruption isn’t something taught at schools or in workshops. Luckily, Sharon’s mentor helped her to understand how traditional business works in Uganda, which led her to figure out how to circumvent it. I’ve learned to deal with clients I know, who don’t ask for money back. For advertising, I’ve learned to ban some people. For consulting, I work with two organizations who don’t ask for money back. I look for a top person. It’s the lower level people who ask for money back. I ask references from my network. I rely on the network of the sales person. Oh, and I never take payment from a bank. People will ask you to transfer them air time (phone credit) so they can go to the bank to see if they have the money to pay you for an advertisement. You’ll never see it. You need to receive payment in cash.”

In Colombia’s organic sector, Earth Institute educated Monica Luzano is founder of Sea Soil S.A. Colombia, a green technology distributor. She is also a certified organic agricultural inspector. However, she believes the visual success of her projects developing composting and improved natural resource management projects speak louder than her certifications to potential new clients. “I focus on doing big projects that showcase my work. I’m at point now where people call me. I don’t have to knock on doors for business,” she says. Concerning her own family’s farm and her clients’ use of the formal “sello de alimento ecologico”, the Colombian government’s organic certification seal, she admits that the political environment has corrupted the value of formal organic certification. “In Colombia, the
The cost of organic certification is expensive. Certification companies started fighting for business. This degraded the meaning of the label.”

Susana Villalobos Chavez founded IBS Soluciones Verdes, a start-up dedicated to converting small farm production from conventional to organic systems and to improving marketing of organic foods in the Costa Rican market. In addition to her undergraduate agricultural training, Susana is taking a course on business innovation at the San Jose classroom of Leipzig University. She has also achieved certification as an organic inspector for US and European requirements, and as an inspector for Good Agricultural Practices. Not only does the formal training convey her credibility, but her experience has earned her a national reputation. Between 2010-2012, Susana led organic agricultural inspections across Central America for a Dutch funded development project named the Program of Support for Organic Markets (PROAMO). For building a website to disseminate information about organic certification processes and markets at PROAMO, she was named one of Costa Rica’s Top 40 under 40 by Costa Rica’s El Financiero Newspaper. “I’m a woman and am young. I am successful because I have proven my high technical level and my work ethic,” she says. “Thanks to this work now it is easy to communicate with people in the organic sector. This is super important because in the consulting business, if you don’t have contacts or support from colleagues, contacts, and friends, you won’t find work.”

Randa Filfili, CEO and co-owner of Zena Exotic Fruits, Sarl, in Senegal, is formally educated as a secondary school math teacher, has been learning the food processing business since joining her husband’s business in 2008. As she leads the company’s expansion into international markets, she’s also learning various markets’ values and political environment. Explaining what she considers to be one of her greatest failures, Randa shared her story of landing a huge deal with a large supermarket chain in the United Arab Emirates. At the last minute, the buyer cancelled the contract when he found out that Zena hadn’t yet acquired ISO 9001 certification. In the Middle East, this certification is increasingly requested of suppliers worldwide as a standard measure of quality. It is designed to “help organizations ensure that they meet the needs of customers and other stakeholders while meeting statutory and regulatory requirements related to the product.” (Wikipedia ISO 9000).

Considering it a lesson learned, Randa has prioritized her company’s investment in obtaining first ISO9001, then ISO22000 – an environmental manufacturing standard. She has realized that these certifications will open doors to numerous new markets. She has her eyes set on developing her existing country-partner markets, but also Russia and Japan. Certifications prove that certain quality assurance and control norms are being met, and while requested by many buyers, are legally required by some governments. Prior to shipping her first two pallets of jams and jellies to the U.S. in 2008, Zena worked with a food scientist sponsored by USAID to implement a Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Points (HACCP) plan to prevent food safety risks from occurring during production. The U.S. requires food processors to have the HACCP plan implemented during production of fresh seafood, dairy, and juice. It is encouraged for manufacturers of all other processed foods. Although not required of Zena’s jams and jellies, Randa has maintained its HACCP based production to stay ahead of the curve.

She captured this sentiment when she said, “Agribusiness is not an easy sector for anyone to work in. Perseverance is key. You always need to be looking at your goal. I cannot even find the words to describe how rewarding my work is. I’m proud to have succeeded, but I continue to learn.”
Leading by example, WELAs rise by circumventing gender barriers.

When I asked each WELA whether they experienced challenges due to culture, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status or other reasons, each woman vaguely replied that their challenges were primarily of a business nature. Grace Mena, Founder of Deli-Café, a specialty coffee exporter in Costa Rica, brashly stated, “It’s not if you’re a man or woman. It’s if you’re successful or not. People judge you based on merit here.”

A few WELAs admitted to having experienced sexism or ethnicism, but hadn’t been discouraged by it. It is perhaps a norm that affects business but is not specific to it. They spent more time finding solutions to problems in order to succeed in spite of any roadblocks. Most of the women shrugged off discrimination, feeling that they didn’t have the time to address the root cause of the roadblocks – at least not directly.

Sharon described problems recovering payments from advertising clients in Uganda. “I’m not concerned that I’m a woman. But it does bring challenges. On the last edition, I had two defaults. When I went to collect the payment the man looked at me. Because I’m a woman, he failed to pay me. I smiled sweetly and talked nicely. If I were a man, he would have paid. But, what can I do? We declared it as a debt.” Even Catherine, who thought her gender may have presented her from obtaining a loan at several banks in Ghana, responded to my question on whether being a woman affected her ability to land sales meetings or make cold calls with, “If the service you’re providing to the client is good, being a woman doesn’t matter.”

Patricia Allen and Carolyn Sachs called upon previous research by Maxine Molyneux and Charlotte Moser to explain that “Women may act to meet their practical needs, such as access to healthy food, without altering gender power relations. These resistance efforts focus on helping women survive within the current structure.” (2007:5). It isn’t clear whether the WELAs have viewed their success as interrupting gender relations in their private lives or in their communities as this wasn’t a focus of the study. It is clear however, that none of the WELAs launched their businesses in order to resist gender power relations. The majority of WELAs acted out of a practical need, either to improve food quality for their children or another disadvantaged group.

Mitslal and Yiver advocated that womanhood is an advantage in business. As explained earlier, Mitslal feels she is better able to understand the farmers she works with – who are mostly women like her, with children and cultural gender specific responsibilities. In Colombia, Yiver explained “In some ways being a woman could be an advantage, today. But only since the last ten years. Before, women produced coffee. Women helped. But now, there’s a space for women to manage their own coffee,” Yiver explained, “The association allows members to broaden this space. More broadly, it empowers women.”

Surprisingly, few WELAs prioritize activities that empower or motivate other women or girls to become successful entrepreneurs in agriculture. When asked if they were involved in any related activities, half of the interviewees described their company’s sponsorship programs for youth education. Only one program, a university scholarship program in food science in Ethiopia, is linked directly to agricultural careers.
Through their different giving programs, it is clear that the WELAs value supporting education as a means to living a higher quality of life, though none of the programs were specific to women or girls. **WELAs recognize substantial opportunity in niche markets.**

In this small cohort of women from Africa, Central, and Latin America, many of the leading entrepreneurs are succeeding in niche markets within the agricultural sector. They are growing cleaner, safer, longer-lasting, and/or organic foods that reduce the quantity of chemical residue being consumed by their children and fellow community members. They are sourcing higher quality foods and commodities from impoverished rural communities, improving human and soil health, and stimulating economic growth in the process. Organic fruits and vegetables, cleaned and packaged fruits and vegetables, processed fruits and vegetables, specialty coffee – all of these products initially serve smaller markets than conventional products.

GEM’s 2012 Women’s Report confirmed that in nearly every economy there are fewer female than male entrepreneurs, and they appear to show reluctance to scale their businesses or to enter new and less tested markets. In Latin America, “the vast majority of women-led businesses in the region are unable to grow beyond microenterprises or move out of the informal economy, which reduces the earning potential of those businesses. Women lead 23% of small businesses in the region, but only 9% of large ones.” (The Economist 2013: 5). According to this, the WELAs are outliers. This is perhaps what sets them apart from the majority of women entrepreneurs in their countries. The WELA participants in this study are those who prefer to do business on the vanguard, recognizing less tested markets as opportunity, and scaling their businesses by creatively relying on a portfolio of resources and strategies.

Monica described her creative organizational structuring to start a business in Colombia’s niche, organic sector. “After college, I returned to my family’s farm to see that we could make it into an excellent, organic business. But, we had to make our own organic pesticides. It was terrible. Our goal was to produce organic guanabana, not inputs. So I identified some organic products in the U.S. and went to look at them in California. I partnered with them, and imported the technologies for my own use - financed by the parent company. Then I started to import the technologies to distribute.” Monica packaged the technologies for sale with her advisory services. She then joined an alliance of likeminded green technology distributors, consultants, and a composting company to share information and job referrals. In the alliance, members specialize in one or a few key technologies within the conservation and/or organic agricultural sector. After seven years, she is managing a fully sustainable small business.

In Senegal, tropical fruits like baobab, ditakh, and guava are not sold in niche markets. They are bountiful and sold in common markets fresh and processed into juices. Zena Exotic Fruits was one of the first companies in Senegal to create a new line of products out of these popular fruits in the form of traditional, French style jams and jellies. In 2006, Randa took the helm of Zena’s stagnant sales department, and targeted foreign, “niche” markets where her products would be considered “exotic”. She explained, “I’m not from Africa. I didn’t know these fruits in Lebanon. But I’m not African and I find the flavors to be magnificent. I knew that if I loved them that others outside of Africa
would love them, too. I went to France to introduce these new flavors at a food show. People loved them. My booth was constantly packed with people. This encouraged me.”

It is common for a company to start small, gradually expanding her production and administrative capacity to reach a greater number of customers. Not only do companies expand, but niche sectors grow into billion dollar industries. For example, the U.S. specialty food market is worth $70 billion annually. Specialty food retail sales grew by 7.4% in 2010, compared to 1% growth in mainstream food sales. The sub-set of ethnic food sales grew at an equally impressive 6%. Certified organic foods represented a $29 billion market, growing by an astounding 7.7% in 2010. Consumers in these high growth, niche markets were less affected than mainstream shoppers by the U.S. economic downturn. (Meszaros 2011). Everything starts somewhere. An interesting question is why these niche sector opportunities for clean and organically grown foods went unaddressed before these women decided to take action.

Agrifood studies of consumption regard consumers as active agents in shaping the food system, and consumers, especially food purchasers, are typically women. (Goodman 2003). Several WELAs cited their own family’s needs for healthy foods as alternatives to what existed for purchase in local markets. Unable to find affordable produce free of chemical residue or contaminated water, they took it upon themselves to produce it and sell it to others. Because in the majority of the world’s cultures, women take responsibility for preparing the food on their families’ tables, it is logical that women are the first to identify problems with available food and recognize an opportunity to improve its quality and affordability.

In her book Farmer Jane, Temra Costa wrote that in the United States, “we have become disconnected from the very people and the land that we are dependent on to provide our very sustenance. We have lost sight of the fact that the fertility of the soil determines our vitality. But this, too, is starting to change.” (Costa, 2010: 7). This rings true in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America as much as it does in the U.S. As urbanization rates increase, people who relied on their own food production now rely on others to provide them with healthy foods in urban markets. As awareness increases about the detrimental effects of farm chemicals on land and human health, women are increasingly seeking out foods that have been grown using organic and conservation methods. Like the WELAs studied here, when more women possess industry knowledge, business skills, confidence, and motivation, they will be better able to make the step from identifying a problem, to recognizing an opportunity, to harnessing an entrepreneurial spirit to act on it. They will too be able to emerge as future agricultural and food sector leaders.

The differences: start-up and growth capital – how they did it
Although nearly all of the WELAs used their own funds to start their businesses (see box) there were a few differences that emerged between the women’s success factors with regard to access to credit and growth capital. Latin American based WELAs easily accessed credit for rolling funds and start-up capital such as land purchases from national or sectoral banks. They didn’t receive bank loans or credit based on the quality of their social network. Each woman in Latin America confirmed that the banks reviewed applications on merit, providing equal consideration for male and female owned business. The founder of IBS Soluciones Verdes, who has only landed her first client within the past year, is confident that she will be able to access affordable business credit at a local bank when she needs to.

African WELAs however, had to be more creative in their strategies to finance their business’ growth. Each had discouraging experiences with traditional banks, yet each found a different strategy to fund company growth. Four of the women secured financing from foreign assistance backed programs.

In spite of her foreign education, proven business success, and confidence, Catherine ran into the same serious obstacle of financing that many entrepreneurs in West Africa eventually experience. “One of our biggest challenges is financial. We supply eight supermarkets including our own outlet. We have to give clients credit, but we struggle to get our money back in some cases. We either adapt or fold our hands.”

To spread her financial risk, she developed more partnerships with supermarkets, knowing that payments from most of them would cover late payments from others. “It’s a juggle. And getting financial assistance in Ghana is difficult. This is where the woman part comes in. Banks here lend more freely to men than women. I don’t know why. Could be because of who you know or the network of men’s groups.”

Unphased, Catherine persevered and found bank staff at African Development Bank (ADB) willing to issue Eden Tree an overdraft. “It is what we really used to grow. After 12 years we became too dependent on the overdraft though.” Most recently, the ADB agreed to re-structure the overdraft into half overdraft and half fixed deposit. Eden Tree is now making monthly payments to reduce the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Starting Up: How they did it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agasha Business Network, LLC</strong> – used own funds and won start-up funds and training from business plan competitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deli-café</strong> – Started on consignment sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ecopia PLC</strong> – Borrowed $1,000 from a friend and had support from international NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eden Tree Limited</strong> – started small with own funds, 200 British pounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Harvest for Hope CSA</strong> – Secured NGO funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IBS Soluciones</strong> – starting with own funds; diversifying services to increase revenues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sea Soil S.A. Colombia</strong> – Partnered with a U.S. company to purchase and sell their technologies through her related advisory firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tisaiwale Trading</strong> – started with own funds, $133 and assistance from international program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yiver Vargas</strong> – Used own funds + gov’t and international program assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zena Exotic Fruits Sarl</strong> – Developed export strategy to stay afloat and expand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
overdraft by 50%. When it is paid off after 18 months, the fixed deposit will become equity. Her growth strategy is worth the effort. Eden Tree’s annual revenues in 2012 were 1.5 bn cedis (~USD$900,000) and she stands ready to take the company into its next growth stage. In the next five years Catherine plans to construct a warehouse and distribution center that includes cold storage facilities for her produce, a wholesale pick-up station, and a public cold chamber where farmers can store their produce for a fee.

All of the women are reinvesting their profits back into their businesses for steady expansion and improvements. Randa weaves together greater financial resources by developing new markets that request higher product volumes, relying on government and NGO assistance, and working with her long-term bank to purchase new equipment. “Several years ago, we wanted to sell the business. Then we realized that we are the only company exporting a range of high quality fruit products out of Africa. Now, we are focused on growth. We follow our clients closely and we are looking for capital investment to expand our production. We have two budgets we are managing for expansion. The first isn’t just rolling funds to purchase greater volumes of raw materials, but it is to improve our organizational structure. This business isn’t just me and Zouheir now. It’s bigger than us. We need more people to help us. We’re getting more involved in professional networks, attending more international trade shows to develop new leads. Our other budget is where we reinvest most of our profits: it’s the budget for new equipment and new technology.”

This is not surprising. It’s well known that small and medium sized enterprises across the developing world have a hard time accessing affordable credit to grow a business. It is likely that women have an even harder time. Babson College Professor Donna J. Kelley, lead author of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor’s 2012 Women’s Report found that, “In most economies around the world, there are fewer women than men starting and running new businesses, but there are even fewer running mature ones. This raises a red flag about the ability of women to easily transition from starting to sustaining their businesses.” Although the report cites different factors for this, including lack of affordable child care options, taking time out of the workforce, and not operating formally, it also confirms women may face discrimination when accessing formal capital markets.

There are numerous organizations that have been working steadily to unlock the “missing middle” capital in emerging economies. The “missing middle” refers to the lack of financing available in amounts greater than micro-credit which is usually capped at $50,000 or less, but less than traditional, institutional financing, which usually begins at $1 million. In spite of the rapid emergence of investment funds, credit guarantee programs, a proliferation of micro-credit lenders, and crowdfunding platforms, “the growth of the SME sector in developing countries is hampered by a lack of access to finance, lagging far behind high-income countries whose SMEs bring in over 50% of the national GDP.” (African Development Bank Group). Most African WELAs attributed difficulty accessing credit to a common business problem faced by all African SMEs regardless of gender. Even Catherine, who had posited that she may have been denied a bank loan based on her gender or lack of involvement in the “boys’ networks”, eventually found a bank willing to work with her.

**A quality professional network is essential to success. The best are those met organically, who you can call anytime without a scheduled meeting.**
With a seemingly bottomless supply of energy, Susana’s perseverance and social network are starting to bear fruit. IBS has recently won its first government contract from Costa Rica’s Ministry of Agriculture to conduct a national assessment of the country’s organic sector.

“This award positions us at the national level. We are not members of any organizations yet, but we call up our former colleagues, students, and friends to exchange information. They trust us and give us leads. It’s no problem to cold-call, but getting face to face meetings are absolutely necessary. We are submitting a proposal to the Ministry of Science and Technology to fund our pilot project of linking organic farmers to national markets. We learned of the opportunity from a contact, but we are submitting the proposal based on merit alone.”

Like her fellow Earth Institute alumni, Susana is applying her specialized training to develop a growing, niche market to benefit her country – and its health. “I’m from a small coffee farm. I saw the effects of chemicals my whole life. I went to university to study organic agricultural engineering because of that. I know the realities of the producers, the misuse of chemicals. Doctors tell us to feed our children fresh fruits and vegetables, but there are few healthy fruits and vegetables in the markets. They are all contaminated with chemicals. American kids can eat organic bananas from Costa Rica. Why can’t our kids here?”

In spite of Costa Rica’s green image, only 2.4% of its agriculture is organic, with most of it exported to wealthier markets in the U.S. and Europe. Most of the crops certified organic are coffee, bananas, cocoa, pineapples, and other tropical fruits. The organic produce that remains in local markets is lower grade quality unfit for export markets. It is usually sold in small, remote village markets where it was produced with little available for more urban dwellers to purchase. The World Future Council, a German think tank spearheaded by Dr. Vandana Shiva among other notables, estimates that Costa Rica’s domestic market for organic produce sales is only $1.5 million annually. (World Future Council 2013).

During our interview, Susana explained that her network isn’t just limited to Costa Rica. Because worldwide, the organic sector is relatively small, she is able to network with a larger number of key players in the international and regional organic sectors.

Grace Mena, a prominent coffee exporter in Costa Rica and President of the IWCA also strongly attributes her success to her skill set, education, and international industry network.

Grace developed her coffee exporting expertise working for a German-owned coffee exporter in Costa Rica. The company focused on volume, not quality, based trading. It was there, in 1993, that she met Mary Williams, who would become her most valuable industry contact – and her mentor.
Back then, the legendary roast master was a relatively un-known buyer from San Francisco who arrived in Costa Rica to introduce the concept of “specialty coffees” to the growers and exporters who supplied her (Fellner 2008: 68). Grace accompanied Mary across Costa Rica and Panama as Mary taught coffee growers to grow high-quality varieties, using conservation farm techniques that respected the soils and varietals’ integrity. She was an ambassador for the rising, new demand in the U.S. for single origin beans. It was during this trip that Grace first learned about the specialty coffees, too. The world market had typically sourced low cost, high yield, coffees, but immediately recognized the new opportunity to respond to a niche market. She learned from Mary how to recognize the different flavor characteristics of brewed coffee, or, to “cup”. Cupping is used in the industry to distinguish coffee qualities based on fragrance, flavor, aftertaste, acidity, body, balance, sweetness, uniformity, and cleanliness (Specialty Coffee Association of America 2013).

After Mary returned to the U.S., Grace felt the timing was right to strike out on her own. She approached a milling company and proposed to sell their beans on consignment to specialty markets in the U.S. market. “Specialty Coffee was rare as most of the milling process was focused in volume, meaning that the cherries were not separated according to altitude, drying was done at very high temperatures and the classification was very poor. Specialty coffee requires red cherries only grown at minimum 1400 meters above sea level, slow drying process at max 40 degrees temperature and strict classification both on the wet mill as well as at the dry milling preparation for export.” Grace promised to pay the miller for the shipment of beans as soon as she received payment. He agreed. Immediately, Grace made her first sale of specialty coffee - to Mary Williams at the Klein Brothers Company in San Francisco.

When Mary took a new job as a buyer at Starbucks, Grace soon Starbucks as her largest client. With instant credibility, she started selling to Peet’s, Illy, and a list of other well known roasters and retailers. Grace paid herself a salary from the beginning and had enough profit left over to hire an assistant. Today, she owns Grupo Laborador, a holding company comprised of holding company comprised of Deli-Café, her coffee exporting company, two mills, and a brand (Nature’s Best) that earns an estimated $20million in annual revenues.

In the competitive, specialty coffee sector, Grace values industry events such as conferences and annual association meetings) for meeting new buyers and following industry trends. She’s a member of all of the international coffee associations and reads all of the industry magazines. In 2005 she founded and presided over the Alianza Internacional de Mujeres en Costa Rica (AMCCCR), Costa Rica’s national chapter of the International Women in Coffee Association. Grace is also a founding member of the Specialty Coffee Association of Costa Rica, former President of the national coffee promotion agency, and currently serves as President of the International Women’s Coffee Association (IWCA). “My first mentor is Mary Williams,” acknowledged Grace, “But all the women in the IWCA are mentors. They are all bright, all exceptional.”
Following my interview with Grace in her company villa in Heredia de Belen, I returned to Colombia and spoke with Yiver Vargas, President of Colombia’s IWCA chapter, the Association de Mujeres en Café de Colombia (AMCC). Prior to her election to the national leadership role, she was the Huila department chapter head.

It’s hard to believe that only five years ago, Yiver didn’t identify as a coffee farmer. With financing from the government’s National Land Institute (Instituto Nacional de Tierras) Yiver and her husband purchased their farmland in southern Colombia in 1998. Over three years they planted coffee trees. During that initial decade of coffee farming, she continued to hold her job as a municipal housing supervisor, only helping her husband on the farm when he needed an extra hand.

In 2008, USAID organized meetings with women across three coffee growing regions of Colombia. They selected 18 existing organizations and provided local legal expertise to officially found an alliance between the regions’ coffee growing women. Two years later, Colombia’s chapter of the International Women in Coffee was born.

It was the initial meeting she attended organized by USAID that sparked her ambition to return to the land full time. Encouraged by her new network of like-minded women coffee farmers, she made a deal with her husband to split their family’s ten hectares of land: 5 ha titled to him, 5 ha titled to her. She began attending USAID sponsored technical and business workshops. “As I grew more interested, learned new farm techniques, quality control, cupping, farm administration, I became motivated to teach others, too.”

Yiver quickly assumed a leadership role in her municipality of 8,000 coffee growers. She focused on building communication between them and the growers in the neighboring regions of Tolima and Cauca. She would get contract information from different coffee groups, and then share that information with groups across the regions. This data allowed the member coffee farmers to negotiate better deals with the same buyers as their neighbors. She also provided them with market information, pricing, and trends in the international coffee industry that she researched in a nearby town on the internet.

As part of a women’s cooperative, she began selling direct to a specialty coffee roaster in California. “Before 2008, everyone sold to the National Coffee Federation and through traditional channels,” she explained. “But as more training became available, the area’s coffee farmers learned more about production and quality. This enabled them to develop new, direct buyers, which led them to increase their profits.” Many women in Colombia’s coffee sector are succeeding by not competing with men, but by specializing in higher value coffee that they are not selling to the national coffee federation, but directly to small, specialty importers.

Klasen and Lamanna have found that this trend is becoming more common as more women take advantage of producing specialty crops on smaller acreages, but with higher value for niche
markets. They write that, “the growth of modern supply chains for high-value agricultural products is creating significant opportunities – and challenges – for women in on-farm and off-farm employment,” (Klasen and Lamanna 2009: 91-132). Yiver went on to explain how this opportunity is helping her family. “Since the women’s alliance has organized, we sell specialty coffee for higher prices. This paid for my kids’ education. I have one son studying international commerce at university. My 16 year old is close to finishing high school. My daughter is 15 and still in school. Each of my children has their own lot to grow coffee. They do their own books and control their own production,” she said.

Her children also help her to communicate in English with foreign buyers. Language has been one of Yiver’s – and several members – greatest challenges to exporting direct. She has been studying English but remarked that there are few language courses available in her remote, rural area. Yiver and many members engage their children’s language skills in English, and social media skills on Facebook and email to communicate with potential buyers in the United States and European Union. Their children often relay messages between growers using SMS texts on their cell phones as well.

CONCLUSION

Objectivity and Generalizability

Berg & Lune (2012) argue that “case methods are as objective as any other data-collection and analysis strategies used by social scientists”. Prior to conducting this research, I have recognized my own biases. I am a woman who has worked in agriculture from her early childhood until present adulthood. I am an entrepreneur in the food marketing sector and have worked with numerous international projects, companies, and governments to improve women’s earnings in agribusiness. I have been careful to only assess the data as presented and coded, and not to allow my own life’s history or perspective influence the research project in any way, except for its initial influence on the choice of this topic for investigation. Consequently, I will argue that there stands a degree of validity and objectivity to my conclusions based on the data alone.

The comparative approach employed in this research results in findings of “how” one gets from one situation or environment to another” but doesn’t allow us to assert that the outcome is widely generalizable. It may be generalizable for some part of a population, but not an entire population (p. 342). I assume that the findings relevant to the group of ten participants in this research do apply to other women who own businesses in similar stages of growth and who operate in the same geographic regions.

Greater research is needed on women leaders in agriculture.

There are few country specific studies on women’s leadership in agriculture and agribusiness. Most of the information available pertains to general women’s leadership or entrepreneurship across sectors. The FAO reports that, “Information is critical in developing effective policies to help women. But out of a sample of 93 national agricultural censuses conducted worldwide from 1989 to 1999, only 53 contained information on female-headed holdings. The census data that are available suggest that in most regions of the world one out of five farms is headed by a woman. Even this figure probably underestimates significantly the proportion of female owners and agricultural managers.” (FAO World Food Summit).

There are numerous awards organizations and studies who document globally, women’s leadership and women in business. The organizations that recognize women in agriculture tend to focus on women
employees of large business or research institutions in the agricultural sector – not entrepreneurs or business owners.

More country specific data and studies on women’s entrepreneurial leadership in agriculture and agribusiness would benefit government policy makers, international development professionals, and current and future women in agribusiness.

It is my hope to foster the growth and publicity of this research project, to include a greater number of WELAs, including corporate “intra-preneurs” and cooperative leaders, better triangulate each WELAs case study, present each in the context of country specific political and business operating environment assessments for women’s emerging entrepreneurial leadership in agriculture; and increase public visibility of each woman’s personal and professional success.
REFERENCES


(www.abalimi.org.za/projects_001.htm).


(http://tedxprincealbert.yousemble.com/speakers).


(http://www.scaa.org/?page=resources&d=cupping-protocols).


# APPENDIX A: Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>African Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGRA</td>
<td>Alliance for a Green Revolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMCC</td>
<td>Association de Mujeres en Café de Colombia (Colombian Association for Women in Coffee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMMCR</td>
<td>Alianza Internacional de Mujeres en Costa Rica (International Alliance for Women in Costa Rica)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSA</td>
<td>Community Supported Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DR</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEM</td>
<td>Global Entrepreneur Monitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HACCP</td>
<td>Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFAD</td>
<td>International Fund for Agricultural Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISO</td>
<td>International Standards Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IWCA</td>
<td>International Women’s Coffee Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROAMO</td>
<td>Program of Support for Organic Markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAIE</td>
<td>South African Institute of Entrepreneurship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARE</td>
<td>Sustainable Agricultural Research and Education Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAWEN</td>
<td>South African Women Entrepreneur’s Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TED</td>
<td>Technology, Entertainment, and Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME</td>
<td>Small and/or Medium Sized Enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USDA</td>
<td>United States Department of Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WELA</td>
<td>Woman Entrepreneurial Leader in Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWF</td>
<td>World Wildlife Foundation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX B: List of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name</th>
<th>Last name</th>
<th>Tel</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Business Name</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Leaders hip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mitslal</td>
<td>251.913421625</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mkm@ecopia.de">mkm@ecopia.de</a></td>
<td>Addis Ababa</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Ecopia</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ecopia.de">www.ecopia.de</a></td>
<td>Processed fruits &amp; veg</td>
<td>TedTalk, Panelist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dinnah</td>
<td>+265(0)999313443</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tsiwalev@yahoo.co.uk">tsiwalev@yahoo.co.uk</a></td>
<td>Mponela</td>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>Tsiwale Trading</td>
<td>on LinkedIn</td>
<td>Input Supply</td>
<td>Awards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>+506.2293.8485</td>
<td><a href="mailto:gmena@deli-cafe.com">gmena@deli-cafe.com</a></td>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>Delicafe</td>
<td><a href="http://www.deli-cafe.com">www.deli-cafe.com</a></td>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>Pres, IWCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Susana</td>
<td>(506) 8715-0930</td>
<td><a href="mailto:susana@ibssolucionesverdes.com">susana@ibssolucionesverdes.com</a></td>
<td>San Jose</td>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>IBS Soluciones Verdes</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ibssolucionesverdes.com">www.ibssolucionesverdes.com</a></td>
<td>Marketing &amp; Advisory</td>
<td>Awards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>+233.302.812.266/244-316.885/208-365.039</td>
<td><a href="mailto:edenstreet@gmail.com">edenstreet@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>Legon-Accra</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>Eden Tree Ltd</td>
<td><a href="http://www.edenstreet.com">www.edenstreet.com</a></td>
<td>Fruits &amp; Veg</td>
<td>Panelist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yiver</td>
<td>+57.3133930033</td>
<td><a href="mailto:yiver014@yahoo.es">yiver014@yahoo.es</a></td>
<td>La Plata</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Cafeteria</td>
<td>on facebook</td>
<td>Coffee</td>
<td>Pres, Colombia chapter, IWCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>256.7036986</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sharon@agashanetwork.com">sharon@agashanetwork.com</a></td>
<td>Kampala</td>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>Agasha Business Network</td>
<td><a href="http://www.agashanetwork.com">www.agashanetwork.com</a></td>
<td>Ag Media</td>
<td>Awards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Randa</td>
<td>221.3363994</td>
<td><a href="mailto:zena_exoticfruits@yahoo.fr">zena_exoticfruits@yahoo.fr</a>; randa@zenae xoticfruits.com</td>
<td>Dakar</td>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>Zena Exotic Fruits</td>
<td><a href="http://www.zenaexoticfru">www.zenaexoticfru</a> its.com</td>
<td>Processed fruits &amp; veg</td>
<td>Panelist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Cristina</td>
<td>27.072.1735 781</td>
<td>Zukiswa Qutyelo &lt;<a href="mailto:fieldworkteam@abalimi.or">fieldworkteam@abalimi.or</a> g.za&gt;; monicalozano <a href="mailto:loque@hotmail.com">loque@hotmail.com</a></td>
<td>Cape Town</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Abalimi</td>
<td><a href="http://www.abalimi">http://www.abalimi</a> .org.za</td>
<td>Fruits &amp; Veg Advisory</td>
<td>Awards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Monica</td>
<td>+57.310.4946.459</td>
<td><a href="mailto:monicalozanolloque@hotmail.com">monicalozanolloque@hotmail.com</a></td>
<td>Bogota</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>SeaSoil SA</td>
<td>facebook</td>
<td>Clean Tech</td>
<td>Panelist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C: Research Protocol and Consent Form

The George Washington University
Global Gender Program

RESEARCH PROTOCOL

How are Women in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America Surmounting Challenges to Rise as Successful Agri-Business Entrepreneurs and Leaders?

Introduction
You are invited to participate in an interview as part of a small-scale study conducted by Marlene Stearns, a graduate student in George Washington University (GWU)'s Masters in International Policy and Practice at the Elliott School of International Affairs. You have been selected due to widespread recognition of your achievements as an agri-business leader. It is my hope that your information and views will contribute to our better understanding of what is working in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America to allow women to emerge as heads of industry in the traditionally, male managed, agricultural and food sectors.

Purpose of the Research
The purpose of this collection of case studies is to gather information that will assist the researcher to answer the following questions: what is working or changing in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America to allow women to emerge as heads of industry in the traditionally, male managed, agricultural and food sectors? Select case studies will be featured in the final working paper produced for George Washington University's Global Gender Program.

Procedures & Confidentiality
If you agree to participate in this case study, you will participate in two brief surveys online and a 45-60 minute interview with Mrs. Marlene Stearns. She will ask you a series of questions related to your experience and strategies. She will follow up with you as necessary after the interview to clarify any responses to ensure accuracy. The session may be audio-recorded. You are not obligated to respond to any questions that you believe is uncomfortable or inappropriate. You may stop your participation in the study at any time.

Any information obtained in connection with this research that could be used to identify you will be kept confidential, unless you provide consent to Ms. Stearns for the use of your name in the final paper by signing the consent form below. The paper itself will be presented to Dr. Barbara Miller, Director of GWU's Global Gender Program, and prepared for presentation at select conferences and publications. Your participation in these case studies will be entirely voluntary.

Risks and Benefits
There are no physical or emotional risks associated with this study. This study will principally benefit the educational awareness of the Principal Researcher, GWU’s Global Gender Program, and interested academic and public organizations. The interviewee may benefit from participation in this case study by expanding her public presence and increasing public awareness of her achievements and goals.

Contact Information and Supervisory
Principal Researcher:
Ms. Marlene Stearns
Bogota, Colombia
Email: stearnsm@gwu.edu
Email: marlene_gummo@yahoo.com
Cell: +57.3210.378.7817

Research Advisor:
Dr. Barbara Miller
Professor of Anthropology & International Affairs
Director, Institute for Global & International Studies
Director, Global Gender Program
Director, Culture in Global Affairs
The Elliott School of International Affairs
1957 E Street, Suite 501
Consent Form

You are being asked to take part in an interview concerning your leadership in the agricultural business community. This interview is being conducted by Marlene Stearns, a Masters of International Policy and Practice candidate at the George Washington University. If you have any questions about this interview or study, please feel free to contact Ms. Stearns or the Research Advisor, Dr. Barbara Miller. Contact information is provided below.

Principal Researcher:
Ms. Marlene Stearns
Bogota, Colombia
Email: stearnsm@gwu.edu
Email: marlene_gummo@yahoo.com
Cell: +57.320.378.7817

Research Advisor:
Dr. Barbara Miller
Professor of Anthropology & International Affairs
Director, Institute for Global & International Studies
Director, Global Gender Program
Director, Culture in Global Affairs
The Elliott School of International Affairs
George Washington University
1957 E Street, Suite 501
Washington, DC 20052
tel. +001-202-994-7257
blog: http://globalgendarcurrent.com/
blog: http://anthropologyworks.com/

There are no physical or emotional risks associated with this study. This study will principally benefit the educational and awareness needs of the Principal Researcher as well as international and domestic programs supporting women’s entrepreneurship and business leadership in agriculture. The interviewee may benefit from participation in this study by knowing that he/she contributed to furthering the knowledge of fellow female entrepreneurs and business leaders and of policy makers and professionals in the agricultural and business development sectors regarding what strategies and/or programs are successfully working to propel women into successful leadership roles.

You have been identified to take part in this interview based on your willingness to participate in the interview when invited by Ms. Stearns. Your participation is voluntary and is much appreciated.

You will be asked to complete two brief, online surveys to provide demographic and business profile information, and to participate in an interview of about twenty questions. The interview may be recorded.

Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to provide any information that you do not wish to provide, or answer any questions that you prefer not to answer. If, at any time, you decide not to continue, you may simply say so and the interview will be terminated. The session may be audio-recorded, subject to your approval.

By signing below, you indicate that you have read and understood what is being asked of you, and that you consent to participate, and for your name, company, and story to be featured in the final paper.

Interviewee/Participant:
_____________________________
Printed Name
_____________________________
Signature
_____________________________
Date

Interviewer
Marlene Stearns_________________
Printed Name
_____________________________
Signature
_____________________________
March 1, 2013_________________
Date
APPENDIX D: Semi-Structured Questionnaire

Semi-Structured Questionnaire
(demographic info collected separately)

1. Tell me about your family – your spouse, children, parents, siblings...

2. When did you first have the idea for your business and how did you bring the idea to fruition?

3. Do you have any certifications? Why did you choose to obtain them?

4. Did you rely on savings to start your business or have you received investment, loans, or other means to launch your business? In other words, where did you get your start up capital from?

5. What were you doing before you launched your business?

6. What drives you to be successful?

7. What are the top five adjectives that most adequately describe you?

8. Would your friends and partners offer different adjectives? If so, which ones?

9. What are the challenges you have faced and how did you overcome them?
   - Gender constraints?
   - Domestic responsibilities?
   - Family responsibilities?
   - Cultural constraints?
   - Ethnic constraints?
   - Legal constraints?
   - Employee constraints?
   - Access to materials, inputs, partners, etc.?
   - Personal? (Health, family, familiarity with technology, other?)

10. What would you consider to be your greatest challenge and how are you overcoming it?

11. How much are your business strategies affected by challenges facing you?

12. Do you credit any programs or resources do you credit with supporting your success? If so, which ones?

13. How important to your success has been the role of social capital, or networking?

14. What is your vision for your organization’s future?

15. What is/are the greatest failures you’ve made in your organization? What lessons did you learn from them?
16. Have you achieved “work-life balance” – that is, are you content with the amounts of time you dedicate to both your personal life and your work life?

17. Who are your mentors or role models? Why?

18. What role does technology play in your success? (Technology refers to plant genetics, computers, cell phones, SMS messaging, skype and other software, etc. This is a broad definition).

19. How do you give back to your community? To girls or other women in agriculture?

20. Do you recommend any reports or books to become familiar with women's successes and challenges in agriculture in your country? Policy related, literature, or otherwise?

21. What is your greatest innovation or creative moment to date?
APPENDIX E: Demographic Survey

CONTACT INFO
1. Name & Address of Business
2. Who is the legal owner of the business?
3. What is the legal status of your business? (LLC, Corporation, Non profit, Sole Proprietorship, Unregistered, etc.)
4. Best way to be contacted: Cell/tel/email/skype: with contact info

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE
1. Age
2. Education level (circle one)
   a. No school
   b. Primary school completion
   c. Secondary school completion
   d. Technical degree completion (post high school)
   e. BA/BS (which subject?__________________________)
   f. Graduate degree (which subject?__________________________)
   g. PhD (subject?__________________________)
3. Marital Status
4. # of Children
   a. 5a. Ages of each child

BUSINESS PROFILE
1. Is your business a farm or other type of agri-business? Please specify:
   a. Farm (conventional or organic)
   b. Agricultural or Food Marketing
   c. Transportation
   d. Agricultural Input Supply
   e. Processing
   f. Packaging
   g. Export
   h. Other____________________________
2. Do you have any certifications?
   • GAP
   • Organic
   • Fair Trade
   • ISO____________________________
   • Other____________________________
3. How many employees do you have?
   a. Full time____________ % Women____________
   b. Part time____________ % Women____________
   c. Seasonal____________ % Women____________
   d. Total____________ % Women____________
4. How many women hold management positions?
5. Please list any associations or organizations you hold a leadership position in, followed by your position in the organization:
6. What are the estimated annual revenues of your business?