



International Symposium **WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH INNOVATION IN MEDITERRANEAN AGRO-FOOD SYSTEMS**

CIHEAM Zaragoza - Campus of Aula Dei
Zaragoza, Spain 10-12 June 2025



CIHEAM
International Centre for
Mediterranean Agricultural Studies



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INTRODUCTION

The International Symposium "Women's Empowerment through Innovation in Mediterranean Agro-food Systems" is organised by CIHEAM Zaragoza and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), in collaboration with the CIHEAM General Secretariat and with the support of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID). This scientific, technical, and professional event brings together representatives from FAO, IFAD, OECD, the European Commission, ICARDA, IWMI, PRIMA, Global Water Partnership Med, as well as actors from civil society, the private sector, and the field of innovation, entrepreneurship and women empowerment.

BACKGROUND

Global agro-food systems face the challenge of nourishing a rising population, while preserving the natural resources and associated ecosystem services that are the basis of our living and economic activity. These challenges are exacerbated in the Mediterranean region, widely recognised as one of the most vulnerable areas in the world to the effects related to climate change, water scarcity, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and food loss and waste, with a clear impact on agro-food systems.

In such a context, innovation and entrepreneurship in agro-food systems are essential for social viability, environmental sustainability and economic development to improve the competitiveness of the Mediterranean region. Comprehensive and deliberate strategies are required to move towards more sustainable and fairer agro-food systems that include overcoming gender inequalities.

Women are recognised as major actors in the agro-food systems. Their contributions are critical to make food systems more inclusive and resilient, given their knowledge of local ecosystems, skills and transformative roles in their communities. The active role of women in agricultural and farming systems, fisheries, and rural development has a direct impact on the creation of economic activity which is essential in many rural areas in the Mediterranean region with an ageing and predominantly male population.

In the last decade, progress has been made in closing the gender gap and strengthening women's participation and empowerment in agro-food systems. However, to create and enable a setting that promotes gender equality and women's empowerment, it is necessary to identify effective gender-transformative approaches for tackling the structural causes of inequalities in agro-food systems.

Achieving this requires increased understanding and knowledge to create strategies that dismantle structural barriers and rigid gender norms, foster equal power dynamics and economic opportunities, optimise women's productivity, and enhance their potential, all as part of a broader gender-transformative change process. Enabling women farmers and producers to innovate by providing the right environment and opportunities will drive agro-food and rural development in the Mediterranean, fostering women's empowerment and benefiting society, the economy, and food security. Coordinated agricultural policy and programmes are now needed to ensure that the path to sustainable development is based on fair, green, and healthy Mediterranean agro-food systems.

OBJECTIVES

The symposium offers a comprehensive and dynamic programme, firmly focused on:

- Identifying and promoting effective solutions for empowering women in the Mediterranean agro-food sector.
- Examining the main obstacles encountered by women in entrepreneurship and innovation in agricultural and rural contexts, in order to develop innovative and sustainable projects.
- Analysing international and national work programmes aimed at stimulating women-led innovation ecosystems.
- Strengthening alliances between international organisations, public institutions, civil society and the private sector to influence innovation through cooperation, mainly among entrepreneurial women.



PROGRAMME

Hybrid format
with English-Spanish interpretation

DAY 1 | 10 June 2025 | CIHEAM Zaragoza | Av. Montañana 1005, Zaragoza

09:30-10:45 | Opening Session. Welcome words by Raúl Compés (Director, CIHEAM Zaragoza)

- Luisa M. García García, Deputy Director of Cooperation with the Arab World and Asia, Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID, Spain).
- Stephen Borg, Deputy Secretary General for Social and Civil Affairs, Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).
- Frida Krifca, President of the CIHEAM Governing Board, Albania.
- M. Begoña García Bernal, Secretary of State for Agriculture and Food (MAPA), Spain.

10:45-11:15 | Coffee Break

11:15-13:00 | Session I – The role of multi-lateral organisations in fostering women-led innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystems in rural areas

Chairperson: Frida Krifca, President of the CIHEAM Governing Board.

Rapporteur: Alun Jones (CIHEAM Zaragoza).

- Tacko Ndiaye, Gender Team Leader, Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division, FAO.
- Leonard Mizzi, Head of Food Systems Unit, European Commission, Directorate-General (DG) for International Partnerships - Sustainable Agri-Food Systems and Fisheries.
- Charlotte Goemans, Programme Coordinator and Policy Analyst, Global Relations and Cooperation Directorate, Middle East and Africa Division, OECD.
- Maria Nikolopoulou, Vice-President of the EESC Equality group, NAT section, EESC.

13:00-14:15 | Lunch

14:15-15:45 | Session II – Major challenges and transformative approaches for rural and agricultural women in the Mediterranean region

Chairperson: Alba Rodríguez (FIAP).

Rapporteur: Emna Sferi (CIHEAM Zaragoza).

- Dina Najjar, Senior Gender and Social Specialist, International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), Morocco.
- Meher Khelifi, CEO start-up 'Ahmini', Tunisia.
- Wafaa Dikah, Senior Adviser, Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture, Vice-President and Delegate of Lebanon on the CIHEAM Governing Board.
- Noura Abdelwahab, Senior Gender and Social Inclusion Expert, International Water Management Institute (IWMI).

15:45-16:15 | Coffee Break

16:15-18:00 | Session III – Needs in education and economic issues for women's empowerment and innovation

Chairperson: Yasmine Seghirate (CIHEAM GS).

Rapporteur: Patrizia Pugliese (CIHEAM Bari).

- Margarita Rico, Professor in the area of Economics, Sociology and Agricultural Policy, University of Valladolid (Spain).
- Dina Raouf, Deputy Director of the Association of Upper Egypt for Education and Development.
- Sonia Boudiche, Professor and Agroeconomist, ESIAT, Representative of the Agri-food Tech Incubator and Director of the 4C-ESIAT Career and Skills Certification Center.
- Anthi Brouma, Deputy Regional Coordinator, Global Water Partnership - Mediterranean (GWP-Med).



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DAY 2 | 11 June 2025 | CIHEAM Zaragoza | Av. Montañana 1005, Zaragoza

09:30-11:00 | Session IV. Women's empowerment and agro-food innovation in Spain

Chairperson: Miriam Ferrer, Head of Planning and Equality Section, Dept. of Agriculture, Livestock and Food, Government of Aragon.

Rapporteur: Julio Urruela (CIHEAM GS).

- Isabel Bombal, Director General of Rural Development, Innovation and Agro-food Training, Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, MAPA.
- Teresa López, President of the Federation of Rural Women's Associations (FADEMUR).
- Carmen Quintanilla, National President of the Association of Families and Women in Rural Areas (AFAMMER). Honorary and Permanent Deputy, Council of Europe.
- María Jesús Lorente Ozcariz. President of CEPYME Zaragoza.

11:00-11:30 | Coffee Break

11:30-13:00 | Session V – Successful associative and cooperation models to increase women's participation in the agricultural labour force and innovation in agro-food systems.

Chairperson: Manuel Nogales, Director of ACODEA (Agency for Development Cooperation in Agriculture), Spain.

Rapporteur: Anna Dorangricchia (UfM).

- Rose Bechara, Founder of Darmmess, Lebanese social enterprise (OLIB project).
- Zahia Kacher, Rural Women's Association, Algeria.
- Dolores Calvo Méndez. Association of Women in Agro-food Cooperatives in Spain (AMCAE).
- Nehayah Almuhaissin, President of the Arab and Jordanian Olive Oil Women's Network.

13:00-14:30 | Lunch

14:30-18:00 | Workshop: Social and technological innovation for women entrepreneurs in the agro-food value chain

Chairperson: Anna Dorangricchia (UfM).

Rapporteur: Giulia Maria Ferraresi (UfM).

- Yosra Ahmed Soltan Abd El-Rahman, PRIMA Innovation Award Winner, Egypt.
- Fidele El Achkar, FoodSight, Lebanon.
- Nouha Benzbir, CIHEAM Innovation Award Winner, Tunisia.
- Antonella Autino, Programme Coordinator at the PRIMA Foundation.

18:00-18:30 | Conclusions and New Agenda

- Sally Shortall, Coordinator GRASS CEILING project.
- Teodoro Miano, Secretary General CIHEAM.

DAY 3 | 12 June 2025

09:00-14:00 | Field visit: Success stories of entrepreneurial women

- Ana Marcén, Leciñena (Zaragoza). Businesswoman, manager and founding partner of *EcoMonegros*. Mentor for rural female entrepreneurs.

