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Naomy Kering
Diaconia University of Applied Sciences
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**SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EM-
POWERMENT: APPLYING AGRIBUSINESS INCUBATION**

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ABSTRACT

Women economic empowerment is still a great challenge in the rural areas of Africa, where the major source of income is agriculture. Most of the farmers do farming for consumption purposes and few of them do it for commercial services. Most of those who participate in agricultural activities are men. Women are assumed to be doing home duties. Agribusiness is doing agriculture for commercial purposes. Like any other business, agribusiness has its challenges and successes. Agribusiness incubation has been known to be a new concept in Africa that helps farmers overcome the challenges in agriculture and agribusiness. In addition, agribusiness incubation has been taken up because of its ability to transform agriculture towards poverty eradication and food security in the region that had been plagued by poverty and food insecurity in the past. Therefore, this research will find out how the process of agribusiness incubation will help women in small-scale agribusinesses overcome the challenges in agriculture and agribusiness and provide them with sustainable source of income.

The main purpose of this study was to explore ways to promote sustainable economic empowerment of women in the rural areas of Africa, where the practice of agriculture is regarded as the main economic activity and a source of income. Firstly, it was to identify the experiences of women who do small-scale agriculture and agribusiness in these areas, and then focus on how the process of agribusiness incubation was used to improve their businesses. The main aim of this study was to identify the challenges women face in small-scale agriculture and agribusiness, and to find out how agribusiness incubation is used to overcome these challenges and promote a sustainable solution to women economic empowerment.

Qualitative research method was used in this study where, raw data was collected during the agribusiness conference in Senegal through individual interviews and note-taking of PowerPoint presentations, and workshops. The research design used was phenomenological approach where lived experiences of women in agribusiness was explored. The data was then analysed through thematic content analysis, and the major themes formed was used to interpret the results of this study.

From the results of this study three broad themes emerged: First, women face challenges in small-scale agribusiness that included lack of financial assistance, lack of support, lack of cheap labour and many more. Second, agribusiness incubation as a sustainable solution to agribusiness challenges is done by bringing in different actors (financial institutions, technological sectors, ICT, private sectors and government) to help farmers overcome challenges in agribusiness and become sustainable. Third, is the economic empowerment of women in small-scale agribusiness, where women get involved in agribusiness activities that offer a sustainable source of income and make them independent.

In conclusion, gender inequality has been a global issue, and promotion of women economic empowerment is part of the solution that contributes towards sustainable developmental goals. Agribusiness incubation has been used as a tool to help small-scale agribusiness in Africa to overcome challenges and become sustainable in terms of income generation, poverty reduction and promotion of food security. If the communities could invest in agribusiness incubation, they could promote sustainable economic empowerment more so to women in the rural areas of Africa. However, there should be more research on how agribusiness incubation works and how the results are realized.

Keywords: Economic Empowerment, Agribusiness, Agriculture, Agribusiness Incubation, Women, Small-Scale Farmers, Africa

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1 INTRODUCTION

As the world is striving towards the achievement of sustainable developmental goals (SDGs), efforts from all the countries and different sectors are needed to attain these goals by 2030. One of the main goals is 'to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' (SDGs). According to the research by (UN 2015,) women and girls are half the world's population and therefore their potential is also half. As of today, gender inequality is still in existence everywhere, and it is believed to have slowed the social progress. Therefore, economic empowerment of women is important to increase economic growth and boost social development. That is, if women participate fully in labour force, it will increase the national growth rate. That is why it is important to invest in income-generating programs for women.

According to the (World Bank 2017,) agricultural sector is a great contributor to the world's economy more so in the emerging markets (the nation's economy that shows progress to the advanced level) an example of developing countries. Nearly 75 % of the world's poor live in rural areas and most of them rely on agriculture as their main source of income and livelihood. There are approximately 500 million smallholder farms worldwide. Most of them are smallholder farmers who grow their crops in small hectares of land and produce about 80% of food to feed Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. If this productivity is improved, it will meet the growing agricultural demands in Africa and the rest of the world.

Women play a major role in agriculture and their contribution accounts for over 40% of the global labour force. Female labour force differs among countries. For example, in Latin America it is 20% and in the parts of Africa and Asia it is 50%. In contrast, small scale women farmers face a lot of challenges in their contribution to the agricultural sector which includes: Unequal land ownership rights whereby, men are believed to own land, get more opportunities and invest more than women; women also face limited access to hired labour, equipment, technology, training, finance and markets; women are involved more on community care responsibilities where they lack time to do agricultural activities; and women still face violence and sexual harassment. (World Bank 2017.)

In sub-Saharan Africa, agribusiness sector still faces a lot of challenges in most of the countries, most of the agricultural production is done by small-scale farmers who are faced with less mechanization and capacity which result to poor yields. Poor markets, unstable prices and poor infrastructure that hinders production. Most of the agricultural products are not competitive globally or have low profit i.e. maize, rice and palm oil. Due to these challenges, it indicates that, sub-Saharan Africa is less equipped to meet its food security which will rise in the next 30 years (IFC 2019.)

Agribusiness incubation are institutions established to eliminate the challenges faced by the agricultural sector. This is through the power of research and information to boost growth in agricultural sector. Agribusiness incubators bring together different sectors like researchers, farmer cooperatives and societies, universities, technical institutes, product transporters, food suppliers, entrepreneurs, business strategists, and financiers to provide the right infrastructure to farmers involved in agribusiness to create wealth and to be competitive globally. So, women could be put into these agribusiness incubators to help them improve their involvement in agriculture and agribusiness. (Ozor 2013, 242.)

Agribusiness incubation as a new concept has been taken up because of its ability to transform agriculture towards poverty eradication and food security in the region that had been plagued by poverty and food insecurity in the past. The concept is poised to unlock the potential of agriculture and consequently drive economic growth and poverty reduction in Africa. Incubators in agribusiness seek to break the barriers associated with the commercialization of innovative products in agribusiness (Ozor, 2013,243.) These barriers include the lack of financial and human capital, poor knowledge of market as well as high costs of commercialization.

Therefore, this research will seek to identify the experiences of women who do small-scale agriculture and agribusiness in the rural areas of Africa. It will first identify the challenges they face while doing their small-scale agriculture and agribusiness, then it will further explore on how agribusiness incubation as a new concept is applied to boost small-scale agriculture and agribusiness, minimise challenges and promote sustainable economic empowerment to women.

2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main purpose of this study is to explore on ways to promote sustainable economic empowerment of women in the rural areas of Africa, where the practice of agriculture is regarded as the main economic activity and a source of income. It will first identify the experiences of women who do small-scale agriculture and agribusiness in these areas, and then focus on how the process of agribusiness incubation is used to improve their businesses. The main aim of this study is to identify the challenges women face in small-scale agriculture and agribusiness, and find out how agribusiness incubation is used to overcome these challenges and promote a sustainable solution to women's economic empowerment. The main research questions for this study are: What are the main challenges women face in doing small-scale agriculture and agribusiness in the rural areas of Africa? How agribusiness incubation process is applied to overcome these challenges and promote sustainable economic empowerment to the women involved in small-scale agriculture and agribusiness?

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Economic Empowerment of Women

According to (Anju et al 2002,3,) empowerment has been identified by World Bank as an element of poverty reduction. In this research we will first define the concept 'empowerment' and its relationship to this research. Empowerment is defined as "the process of enhancing an individual's or group's capacity to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Empowerment has become a familiar term within many development agencies. Empowerment objectives also appear with increasing frequency in policy documents issued by governments, especially strategy papers dealing with poverty reduction.

When we talk of empowerment, we need to understand who actually needs to be empowered. As defined by (Alsop et al 2005, 1,) empowerment often means redressing imbalances of power between those who have it and those who do not. Sometimes, power can be misused and can cause resistance of actions and efforts to empower the desired group. This resistance needs to be considered by practitioners and policy makers when planning and monitoring empowerment strategies and interventions. Investments and interventions can empower people. It is important to understand the vulnerability of the poor in order to be successful in policies and actions that can alleviate poverty. Women, or marginalised groups i.e pastoralists from Ethiopia and Dalits from India are the most affected because they are not given a chance to make effective choices. This is because they are often defined by social attributes that touches on sensitive cultural issues, and empowerment can bring change to the social believes and practices. (Alsop et al 2005, 4.)

Empowerment is further defined by (Alsop et al 2005, 10-12) as a group's or individual's capacity to make effective choices, that is, to make choices and then to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Women, in particular, are often locked into a cultural framework in which they perceive their disempowerment to be right and proper. The capacity of these women to choose a different way of living requires a change in their psychological asset which, in this case, is prerequisite to a change in the social institutions governing the rights of women and men. Empowerment may also mean, tackling the

differences in capabilities that prevent the actors from making effective choices. (Alsop et al 2005,16.)

In addition, empowerment is regarded as a process of elimination of inequality and injustice through which people can decide what is important to them according to their experiences. Women empowerment can be in form of decision making involvement, negotiation, and cooperation in ownership and use of resources. (Manzanera-Ruiz et al 2016, 5.) Overcoming gender roles to achieve empowerment of women is difficult. And to tackle structural inequalities like access to education and health care, income generation, means of production and, access to basic goods and services cannot be done by individual women but by women who come together. (Manzanera-Ruiz et al 2015,6)

According to (UNDP 2008, 4) it states that, despite steady improvements to women's and girls' access to education and health in many of the world's poorest countries, progress on women's economic empowerment is badly off track. In developing countries, women consistently lag behind men in formal labour force participation and entrepreneurship. They earn less than men for similar work, have less access to credit, have low inheritance and ownership rights than men. Action needs to be taken to address the underlying causes that restrict women's economic opportunities not only for gender equality but also for overall poverty reduction: it is bad economics to leave such a large human resource untapped.

The United Nations Population Fund defines women's empowerment through five major components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally. These five components are particularly applicable to the economic sphere, where women's economic empowerment can be achieved by targeting initiatives to expand women's economic opportunity; strengthen their legal status and rights; and ensure their voice, inclusion and participation in economic decision-making.

According to the survey made by International Monetary Fund in 2006 on the relationship between gender inequality and economic growth, it was concluded that “societies that increase women’s access to education, health care, employment, and credit, and narrow the differences between women and men in economic opportunities, increase the pace of economic development and reduce poverty.” (UNDP 2008, 10.) It was further pointed out from the recent research that education is the key to gender equality which promotes higher productivity, rise in gross domestic product (GDP) and more entrepreneurial success. (UNDP 2008, 14.)

Promoting women economic opportunities can be in many forms like, the development of women entrepreneurship opportunities and capacity, considering gender in employment, promoting women access to finance, and improving women’s livelihood in general. These opportunities will be sustainable if the overall workloads are reduced in women. Most women in low-income rural communities engage in household tasks that take a lot of time and prevent them from engaging in economic activities. As such, they will not be able to take advantage of economic opportunities, will not respond to changing market conditions nor participate in income-generating activities. Reducing the women’s burden of unpaid work is important to help women and men create balance between domestic responsibilities with economic activities and to invest in interventions that alleviate women’s domestic workload. (UNDP 2008, 21.)

According to (Akite et al 2018, 2,) the involvement of women and men in different types of agriculture in Africa depends on the local customs, and it is influenced by social, cultural and religious factors. Gender participation is believed to have an important role in stimulating small-holder farming growth in rural areas of Africa where manual labour has dominated production. Gender involvement in farming and non-farming activities in Africa varies in different countries and cultures, this variation and lack of gender consideration has created a lot of implications in agricultural development yet farm productivity in sub-Saharan Africa is still low as compared to other countries. Gender participation is regarded as an important concept as it determines the constraints and opportunities for innovation and adoption of technology in East Africa.

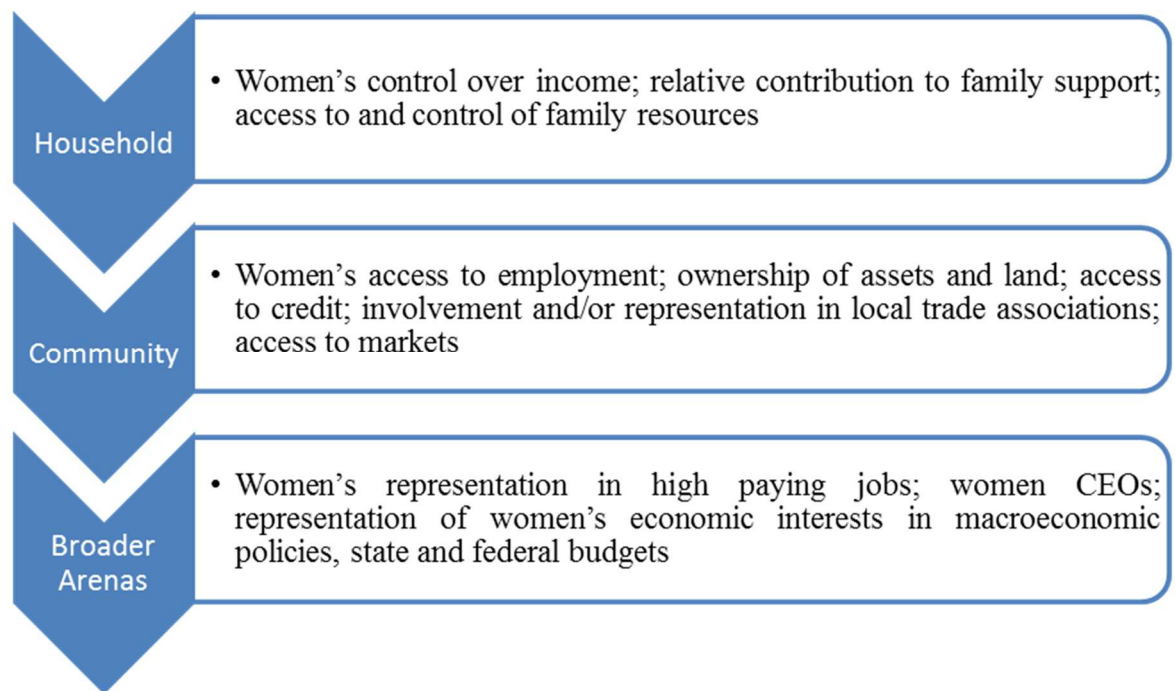
The research further emphasized on the importance of value chains (refers to the whole range of goods and services necessary for an agricultural product to move from the farm

to the final customer or consumer) when men and women are involved in them. It provides opportunities like access to markets and employment. It will also reduce poverty and promote productivity and sustainability. Factors like limited access to resources like land, and because women are mostly dealing with family welfare, they spend so much time on family and little time on income-generating activities. The research stressed the importance of men and women working together to generate wealth and resources to the family even if they don't have an equal share of wealth. (Akite et al 2018,1.)

Economic empowerment is the capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth. Regarding women, economic empowerment increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information. (OECD 2011,6.) Women's economic empowerment is an important concept because, women are the most vulnerable as far as the economic status is concerned, more so in the rural areas of Africa. Therefore, finding ways of how to empower them economically, will help them earn income, support their families, and contribute to the economic growth and development.

There are three dimensions of women economic empowerment, namely: Household, community and broader arenas. A) *Household* means that the women are empowered to take control over income, relative contribution to the family support, access to and control of family resources. B) *Community* means women are empowered to access to employment; ownership of assets and land; access to credit; involvement and/or representation in local trade associations; and access to markets. C) *Broader arenas* mean women are empowered to representation in high paying jobs; women CEOs; representation of women's economic interests in macroeconomic policies, state and federal budgets. (Fox et al 2017.) This research will focus on economic empowerment of women on community level. It will explore on how agribusiness incubation will promote women's access to employment, access to credit, involvement and/or representation in local trade associations, access to markets, take control over income, support the family, and access and control family resources. Table 1 below shows examples of the 3 dimensions.

Table 1: The 3 dimensions of the economic empowerment of women



Source: (Anju et al 2002,13.)

When women are given access to economic assets like education, earned income and ownership of property, it gives them empowerment inside and outside of their household. This will also help them to participate in decision-making in all aspects including, family, political and social levels. And if women become active in economic decision making, household inequality will diminish. (Kagotho 2018,768-769.)

According to the (UN 2018,) in the 21st century, women seem to enjoy more freedom and power than was before, but they are still disadvantaged in all the aspects than men. They are still denied the access to healthcare, capital, education, decision and power to participate in politics, social and business. So, men are dominating in performing about three quarters of the economic activities in developing countries and women do about 53% of the work in agriculture. The (UNDP 2016) also says that, 52% of the population in Africa are women, they are estimated to produce about 75% of the work and produce between 60%-70% of the food, and they only earn 10 percent of the African incomes. This indicates that there are still challenges women face towards the promotion of gender equality despite the efforts made by the governments, NGOs and the multilateral agencies for development in developing countries. (UNDP 2016.)

According to the global statistics made by the (UN 2018,) they found out that, women are paid less than men as the gender wage gap is 23%, that means men earn 77% of the wage. This shows the extend of the gender gaps in developing countries where the self-employment is informal. Empowering women economically is important in order to realize the women rights and gender equality. This includes their ability to equally participate in existing markets, get access to decent work, get access and control the most productive resources, having control and management of their own time, get their voices heard, participate in economic decision-making from household to international level.

According to the (UN 2018) report, it states that, empowering women economically and reducing the gender gaps globally will be the key to achieving the SDG's by 2030. It will majorly target the following goals; Goal 1 ending the poverty, goal 2 food security, goal 3 ensuring health, goal 5, to achieve gender equality, goal 8 to promote full and productive employment and decent work for all, and goal 10 to reduce inequalities. It went further to say that, when women work, economies grow. And when women are economically empowered, it increases their productivity. In addition, it promotes income equality and economic diversification. Moreover, when female employments increase, it boosts Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by over 6 trillion USD. This growth does not end the gender inequality but saves the costs of closing the gender gap which equates to 15 percent of the GDP.

3.2 Women in Agribusiness and its Challenges

Agribusiness is a broad concept that covers input suppliers, agro-processors, traders, exporters and retailers. It provides inputs to farmers and connects them to consumers through financing, handling, processing, storage, transportation, marketing and distribution of agro-industry products, and can be subdivided further into four main groups:

First, agricultural input industry for increasing agricultural productivity, such as agricultural machinery, equipment and tools; fertilizers, pesticides, insecticides; irrigation systems and related equipment; Second, agro-industry, which deals with food and beverages; it includes tobacco products, leather and leather products; textile, footwear

and garment; wood and wood products; rubber products; as well as construction industry products based on agricultural materials; Third, equipment for processing agricultural raw materials, including machinery, tools, storage facilities, cooling technology and spare parts; Fourth, various services such as financing, marketing and distribution firms, including storage, transport, ICTs, packaging materials and design for better marketing and distribution.

Agribusiness is thus a term used to mean farming plus all the other industries and services that constitute the supply chain from farm through processing, wholesaling and retailing to the consumer (from farm to fork in the case of food products.) (Yumkella et al 2011, 26.) This study will focus on this concept because it is one of the strategies that can be used to improve the economic status of women more so to those living in rural areas where agriculture is practised for economic purposes.

Most of the Africans live in rural areas and rely on agriculture as the main source of income and employment. Agriculture contributes about 15% of Growth Domestic Product (GDP) which is almost two thirds of the total employment of 64.7% and over 75% of domestic trade. This has promoted livelihood for the majority who are economically active. Agriculture has played an important role to those who are poor, engaged in farming and live in the rural areas.

Technology and capital are the main influencers of women participation in value chains, often, women have limited access to these influencers and therefore reduces the participation of women to the value chains that have higher incomes and thus limits their benefits from the chains. So the main factors that limits gender participation is socio-cultural and economic factors that includes perceptions and beliefs, land ownership, roles of gender, labour and capital. (Akite et al 2018, 1.)

According to (Yumkella et al 2011, 40,) the missing link is lack of agricultural inputs and processing equipments. These are also the major components of agribusiness value chains. These components are limited in African agriculture and therefore, causes limitation in agricultural productivity and supply of raw materials for agro-industrial processing. This affects the agribusiness value-chains, Africa's agricultural and industrial development. Furthermore, due to undercapitalization, African agriculture continue to

experience so many challenges like, low levels of mechanization which contributes to low agricultural productivity in so many parts of the developing countries.

The main reason for choosing to research on agribusiness over other businesses, is that, for the past years, agribusiness has shown a development path with great productivity throughout the value chains. On the other hand, manufacturing has not contributed much to the economic development of Africa till date. Therefore, the support of agribusiness and agro-industrial development will result in the reduction of poverty, promote the achievement of SDG's and increase employment. In addition, agribusiness has been found to contribute to the following goals : reducing poverty and hunger, empowering women, and developing global partnerships towards global development. If agribusiness is done efficiently, it may promote agricultural growth and create a strong link between agribusiness and small scale farmers to reduce rural poverty. (Yumkella 2011, 47-48.)

Lack of women's access to productive resource, education and technology has created a gender gap in labour force participation in paid and decent work. Women are always disadvantage in factors influencing rural farmers' participation in the production of high value cash crops. These factors include, gender imbalance in labour markets due to gender division of labour, poor access to education and skill training, social norms and restrictions that prevents rural women access to and control over land and capital. All these factors contribute to differentials in gender productivity and thus hinders the process of women's economic empowerment and gender balance in development. (Hudu 2017, 143.)

Female entrepreneurs are influenced by family factors which directly influence their entrepreneurial process. Female entrepreneurship is better understood when family/household factors is understood. This is because women are still regarded as family nurturers and caregivers and therefore are supposed to take care of the needs of dependents. Therefore, the time spend in business is limited due to these roles. Also, it can cause a work-family conflicts because women entrepreneurs are assumed a greater responsibility at home than at work as opposed to male entrepreneurs. (Muñoz-Fernández et al 2019,6.) Since women are believed to have less time to work on their own farms and businesses because they are believed to be dealing with other family chores, it has led to women having less time in networking and therefore, limit them in getting sources of

funds, customers, markets as well as new knowledge and information. This has also resulted in women being less innovative and lack of expansion in their businesses. (Langevang et al 2015, 20.)

The country's state of economic development determines the level and type of female entrepreneurial activity. For example, in poor countries, entrepreneurship is seen as a way out of poverty while in wealthier countries, women go for unexploited opportunities. So, this explains why women are being pushed rather than pulled into entrepreneurship. (Muñoz-Fernández et al 2019,8.) The promotion of female entrepreneurship has been a great focus in Global South as it is believed to create employment, improve the family welfare and reduce poverty. In the past, female economic activities had been regarded as invisible, informal, unrecorded, marginal and survivalist. Presently, women's economic roles have been recognised as important. This recognition has resulted in a major focus on overcoming barriers that women face on their entrepreneurial journey. (Langevang et al 2015, 2.)

Economic development and women's empowerment are related in that, empowering women will mean, including them in decision-making and therefore, give a direct impact on development. For example, it creates an improvement in child's welfare in terms of health and nutrition. (Duflo 2012, 27.) Economic development also reduces poverty. In addition, it helps households to overcome crises and helps governments to take care of its citizens health through insurance cover. It is argued out that, by minimising the vulnerability of the poor households to risks, will help improve on their well-being.

Women are believed to be the main contributors of the rural and global economy. For the last few years, there has been an increase in their involvement in agriculture and they now make up to half of the world's farmers. Because of the increase in the number of men migrated to the cities, it has resulted to more female-headed households. Women are termed as the primary givers of families and communities and are believed to provide food and nutrition. They are also believed to act as a link between the farm and the table. This is because they work in the farms and prepare food to be eaten.

In rural economies, women account for a significant proportion of the agricultural workforce in many countries and play a major role as smallholders, wage labourers and

value chain actors. Their contribution will rise in regions characterised by the strong outflow of male migrants and the shift into non-farm employment, which will result in the further feminisation of the agricultural sector. (World Bank 2011) states that, while most of the studies on female entrepreneurs in Africa have investigated the entrepreneurs, their enterprises and the entrepreneurial environment, there is a little mention on how these ventures are incubated and nurtured throughout their life cycles. Although the women and men are involved in the entrepreneurship process, their experience and participation seems to differ. Therefore, there should be a specific support for female entrepreneurs to appreciate their contributions in local economic growth.

According to the recent research by (World Bank 2018,) the challenge is to better integrate small scale farmers into markets so that they can make the agricultural sector stronger. The research shows that, when a country's agricultural sector is not competitive, there is greater reliance on imports and less agriculture-driven poverty reduction in rural areas. Agribusiness small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are critical to link smallholder producers to national markets, meet food demand and create tomorrow's jobs.

World Bank states that, "as the global community works toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among them is the aim to end hunger and malnutrition by 2030 women can be the key agents of change in agriculture, nutrition and rural development. With better access to information, training, and technology, women can alter food production and consumption so that land and resources are used sustainably" (World Bank 2017.)An increase in participation of women in agricultural tasks, the existence of a gender gap in agricultural productivity and the need to boost Africa's agricultural output is increasing the attention to support women in agricultural productivity.

3.3 Agribusiness Incubation

Agribusiness incubation is defined as a process which focuses on nurturing innovative early-stage enterprises that have high growth potential to become competitive agribusinesses by serving, adding value or linking to farm producer (World Bank 2017.)This concept is used in this study because it is a new concept in Africa that has been used to help farmers improve on their production and help them deal with the

challenges involved in agribusiness. According (World Bank et al 2011) research, they found out that, agribusiness incubators are still recent in developing countries, and that, agribusiness incubators are the new path for agribusiness development that needs a lot of efforts from global institutions and strong support of policy from the national government in order to be successful.

Agribusiness incubation is a new innovation in Africa that requires more research and new developments in order to meet the global demands. (Juma 2011, 51) defines an innovation system as a network of organizations, enterprises, and individuals focused on bringing new products, new processes, and new forms of organization into economic use, together with the institutions and policies that affect their behaviour and performance. The innovation systems concept embraces not only the science suppliers, but the totality and interaction of actors involved in innovation.

Agribusiness incubators are institutions established to eliminate barriers associated with the agribusiness sector through the harnessing of power and information infrastructures necessary for driving research and growth in Africa's agricultural sector. Agribusiness incubators create a conducive environment as well as collaborations and linkages among agriculturally-related industries thus leading to the creation of creative and entrepreneurial energies in the sector. (Ozor 2013, 248.) Incubators bring together various players in the agribusiness sector including researchers, farmer cooperatives and societies, universities, technical institutes, product transporters, and food suppliers, entrepreneurs, business strategists, and financiers. The social purpose of incubators is to increase the wealth of communities through the provision of knowledge and the appropriate infrastructure for agribusiness players to become more competitive in the global economy.

African Development Bank coordinates the activities of various agribusiness incubation programs to boost the role of women and youth in agricultural development in Africa. Such incubations include Forum for Agriculture Research in Africa (FARA), Alliance for Green Revolution (AGRA) and Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IIAT). The purpose of these collaborations and coordinated efforts seek to create options for women and youth engagement in agribusiness, increase networking and financing mechanisms as well as trade and investment along agricultural value chains. (AFDB 2019,13-14.)

3.3.1 Agribusiness Incubator as an Organization

Agribusiness incubators are organizations established to nurture innovative agribusinesses so that they can become competitive businesses in the market. The incubation process offers a combination of various services and products such as facilities and equipment, financial services, networking and mentoring as well as business development techniques to transform agribusiness startups (newly established businesses) and ensure their successful operations in the market. Agribusiness incubators provide the following critical functions to agribusiness startups to boost their overall performance:

Capacity Building: Agribusiness incubators support agribusiness startups in obtaining, improving and retaining skills, tools, knowledge, and other resources critical for the transformation of the current operations to achieve higher capacity as measured by increased profitability and ability to meet consumer needs adequately. (Hjortsø et al., 2017, 24.)

Assistance to obtain finances: Access to funding has been a significant limitation in the operations of agribusinesses. Agribusiness incubators support these startups to access funds through collaboration with various financial institutions that will provide access to finances at the most favorable terms to support their growth. (Hjortsø et al., 2017, 24.)

Technical Consultancy: Agribusiness incubators offer technical expertise to agricultural startups on specialized areas such as business planning, governance, and financial management as well as the day-to-day management of the agribusiness enterprises. (Bonny 2019, 54). This information is critical in the successful running of operations as well as decision-making in these organizations.

Provision of infrastructure: It is critical that agribusinesses have sufficient capital for operations as well as accessibility to markets. The agribusiness incubators support the agribusiness startups through the provision of resources necessary for the acquisition of

capital works such as machinery and equipment as well as improving the overall connectivity to markets.

Services on product development: Agribusiness incubators offer innovative and value-addition techniques to support agribusinesses in the development of unique products to meet the current market needs for such products.

Services on testing and quality control: Testing and quality control in agribusiness involves the acquisition of information on product quality as well as acting on the available data to prevent defective products from reaching consumers. Agribusiness incubators support agribusinesses to achieve this objective through the provision of testing and quality control techniques and processes to ensure the provision of high quality products to the ultimate consumers.

Business consultancy: Agribusiness ventures are established with an objective of attaining profitability. Agribusiness incubators support the achievement of this objective through the assessment of a firm's profitability, giving timely advice on the market trends as well as advising on the maximization of revenues through cost optimization techniques.

Promotion and publicity: There is a need by agribusinesses to create awareness about their products in the market. The need for advertising and publicity is driven by the objective to provide information, increase the demand for a product, differentiate products in the market, accentuate the value of the product as well as stabilize sales. Agribusiness incubators provide the necessary platforms for agribusinesses to increase publicity and promote their products such as agricultural magazines, events, and exhibitions.

Market Assistance: Agribusiness incubators are critical in the provision of market assistance services to agribusiness ventures. The incubators evaluate markets to determine the needs of the consumers and consequently advice the agribusiness ventures of these needs to support their production and value addition to products. The incubators also support the agribusiness ventures access to the markets through the movement of products from farms and production centers to the ultimate consumers. In addition, the

incubators support the agribusinesses to make contact with new customers, preparing work estimates, proposals, equipment certification and controlling the quality of products and services. (Almeida, 2010, p. 45.)

Business planning and market studies: Success of agribusiness ventures is founded on their ability to establish effective business plans as well as access to critical market information. The incubators support the agribusiness ventures through training on effective business planning techniques as well as the provision of information about the markets that will help the operations and productivity of these ventures for overall profitability. (Singh et al 2011, 395.) Figure 2 below shows a summary of how incubator works.



Figure 4: *An Agribusiness Incubator* (Source: African Agribusiness Incubators Network (AAIN))

3.3.2 Incubation Process and Services

There are steps taken in order to create an incubator. The incubators differ according to the targeted clients and services offered. Some incubators have a very narrow focus engaging with one type of farmers producing the same product, whereas, other incubators target a variety of incubatee categories and sectors. Some incubators focus on individual entrepreneurs or start-ups, some build up and sustain entire value chains, and some leverage entire agricultural sectors. Depending on the scope of operations of the incubator, potential target clients and collaborators can be first movers in a sector, farmer associations, and value chain integrators that allow the incubator to influence entire value chains.

Incubation is done in stages. and before the incubation process is done, there is a process known as *lead generation*: This includes awareness raising, social networking, web promotion, start-up weekends, and boot camps (a training camp for learning various types of skills). It is followed by the three stages of incubation which includes:

a) *Pre-incubation stage*: This includes innovation assessment, business plan elaboration, business modelling, training, team-building, and networking. Pre-incubation relates to the overall activities needed to support the potential entrepreneur in developing his/her business idea, business model and business plan, to boost the chances to arrive to an effective start-up creation. It usually implies a first assessment of the idea, training, and direct one- to-one assistance necessary to put the client in the conditions to write a fully complete business plan. University-affiliated incubators are usually pre-incubators.

b) *Incubation stage*: This includes access to finance, coaching and mentoring, hosting, training, commercialization, and advanced business planning. Incubation concerns the support given to the entrepreneur from the start-up to the expansion phase/post-incubation stage. Typically, this is a mid-term process, lasting usually for the first three years of activity of the newly established company, which are the years in which it is safe to say whether the new venture is successful and has a good chance to develop into a fully

mature company. The actions activated generally are access to finance, direct coaching and mentoring services, as well as hosting services and specific training. Therefore, physical incubation, although a very important service, is a subset of the overall incubation process.

c) *Post-incubation stage*: It includes innovation diagnostics, internalization support, technology commercialization, clustering, and business development. Post-incubation relates to the activities to be carried out when the company has reached the maturity phase, and therefore is ready to walk on its own feet. It is the time when, if it has been physically incubated, the company will leave the incubator. Various services might still be needed by the SME for example to increase its sales or improve its productive processes, such as internationalization services or innovation introduction through scouting and detection activities. Incubators positioned as “post incubators” sometime rename themselves as “accelerators”.(EU 2010, 5-6.)

Several factors distinguish agribusiness incubation from standard business incubation. First of all, agribusiness incubators must compensate for unique, high-risk agricultural conditions and for high price variability in agribusiness markets. Secondly, agribusiness incubators fill in missing links in farm to market chains. Thirdly, agribusiness incubators help move from low value commodities to valued added products. Fourthly, agribusiness incubators coordinate policy, strategy and investment priorities both within business ecosystems and with governments. Lastly, agribusiness incubators must build bridges between different rural and urban commercial cultures and different business processes. (Infodev,2009,39.) Therefore, this research will explore on how putting women in agribusiness incubators will help them do sustainable small-scale agribusinesses that could impact their lives and the whole society.

Agribusiness incubations in Africa have been critical in the transformational process of strengthening the link between business and agriculture and integrating higher education institutions into the agricultural value chain. Establishment of partnerships among key stakeholders in the agricultural sector such as international groups, the government, and the private sector, brought together by incubation projects, has been critical in boosting and encouraging better value chain management for agriculture across the African continent. The projects have been essential in capacity building, agribusiness-linked

knowledge transfer programs at different levels as well as education and improved infrastructural developments for enhanced performance in the sector. (Payumo et al, 2017.)

Agribusiness incubations in Africa have already been successful in transforming Africa's agriculture into a competitive sector among some African countries. Timbali Technology Incubator in South Africa is an example of a successful incubator in Sub-Saharan Africa. It was started in 2003, its main aim is to set up small-scale farmers in sustainable businesses. It supported 185 agripreneurs, recorded 100% survival rate in first and second year, 100% of their small-scale agribusinesses are black owned, 77% of their small-scale agribusinesses are female owned and has created about 700 jobs in the year 2013/2014.

Another example is Technoserve Business Solution to Poverty in Mozambique which has recorded 50 years of impact in 29 developing countries. With the support of corporate partners like The Coca-Cola Company and Nespresso and institutional partners like USAID and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, TechnoServe increased the revenue and wages of 110,000 women in 2015. By 2017, TechnoServe's aim was to ensure that at least 40 percent of their beneficiaries were women, in line with women's participation in agriculture and in small-medium enterprises in the countries they worked in. TechnoServe is helping enterprising women in developing countries build competitive farms and businesses to break the cycle of poverty. Their focus is on generating opportunities for women by connecting them to capital, networks and supply chains. The third example which has been successful is Uganda Industrial Research Institute (UIRI), in Kampala, Uganda which assists innovative, early stage entrepreneurs with mentoring and support in strategy and practice of growing a sustainable business.

However, gaps still exist, there is a need to develop and nurture these programs to serve as areas with potential growth opportunities for the continent. (Kyaruzi et al 2008,47.) The agribusiness incubations should critically examine the demand and supply conditions of products and services to ensure efficiency in production. Efficient management of agribusiness incubations is crucial in reducing the poverty levels in Africa and enhancing economic growth through the launch and implementation of new enterprises. The latter is made possible through the creation of an environment that encourages the growth and productivity of new agribusiness ventures.

4 METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research method was used in this study where, raw data was collected from the conference through individual interviews and note-taking from PowerPoint presentations and workshops. The content was then analysed through thematic content analysis, and the major themes formed was used to interpret the results. I chose this method because my research was about women economic empowerment which is one of the key areas in community development. I also wanted to know the experiences of women in agribusiness because qualitative research is more on lived experiences and human perceptions (Rutberg et al 2018,2.) Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences. (Butina et al 2015,186.)

In addition, the reason why the data collection was done during the conference is that, I wanted to conduct the interviews within the participants natural setting, where the participants will feel more comfortable to express themselves. (Glenwick et al 2016,14) argues that, qualitative methods value the uniqueness of people and settings, and do not aim for, nor claim, generalizability, nor bound by statistical necessities of random sampling strategies. Thus, their population of interest is usually localized. As such, sampling in qualitative research focuses on gaining rich, local information, as opposed to gleaning generalized, global summaries. I also needed a thorough understanding of the process of agribusiness incubation and how it promotes sustainable economic empowerment to women. One of the main characteristics of qualitative research is the need to understand more about the problem and the desire to explore it thoroughly (Rutberg et al 2018,2.) As a researcher, I wanted to explore the meaning of their words and experiences. (Glenwick et al 2016,13) argues that, the interaction between researcher and participant play a role in the production of data and findings.

The research design used in this study is phenomenological approach where the lived experiences of women in agribusiness was explored. Phenomenological approach deals with the meanings of the lived experiences of a phenomenon by several individuals, and in this case it focuses on the women in agribusiness. (Manen 2017, 4.) I wanted to know the impact of agribusiness to them. To begin with, I designed a problem to be studied,

then simplified into a specific issue , and finally, developed questions surrounding the issue to be studied.

Purposeful sampling was used in this study because, it deals with the identification/ selection of individuals or groups that have knowledge or experience with a phenomenon of interest. (Palinkas et al 2015,2.) In this case, I chose to interview individuals that were familiar with the phenomenon of study. They included women who were already in agribusiness, incubator trainers, agribusiness innovators, and incubator partners/actors from different sectors and expertise.The sampling process was done based on the categories of data analysis where data was collected, coded, analysed, categorised into themes and final write-up was done. (Flick 2009, 399.)

As researcher, I wanted to know about the sustainable solutions of women's economic empowerment. Therefore, qualitative research as a method was adapted in this study because it provides professionals with valuable tools for the development and evaluation of policies aimed at addressing the problems like poverty, economic dislocation and many others in many contemporary communities (Silverman et al 2014, 3.)

As this study was qualitative, it incorporated two different methods of collecting data which is interviews and note-taking.This was to gather a broader spectrum of evidence and perspective to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of an analysis.According to (Saldana 2011,73,) some qualitative research studies may employ only one data collection method, such as interviewing participants, because the personal histories and worldviews of individuals will best answer the researcher's questions. But rather than quantitatively measuring the outcomes, qualitative methods are used to gather participant perceptions of both the process and outcomes.

In general, every research method has its advantages and disadvantages.(Silverman 2009, 11) argues that, while there is a general sense among some researchers that qualitative data are inherently more 'interesting' than numbers, there are less aesthetically oriented and more analytically astute reasons for choosing qualitative methods. (Silverman 2009, 12) concluded that, qualitative research is not always appropriate to every research problem. You need to think through exactly what you are trying to achieve rather than

being guided by some fashion or trivial preference (perhaps you are not comfortable doing statistical calculations).

4.1 Target Organization

The target organization was the African Agribusiness Incubators Network (AAIN). It is based in Accra, Ghana. AAIN is nurturing member incubators to answer to the needs of incubates in an ever-changing agribusiness environment to create more jobs and wealth using tested models of agribusiness incubation with 4 core investment areas: (i) human & institutional capacity development in incubation, (ii) youth & women engagement in agribusiness trade & investment, (iii) african agribusiness incubation fund (AAIF), (iv) technology & innovations commercialization.

This Organization was chosen because it is a network of incubators in Africa which deals with women and youth in Agribusiness. They train small-scale farmers to venture into sustainable agribusiness. AAIN create a business environment whereby they engage different actors including private sectors, universities, governments, financial institutions, research organisations, development partners and umbrella bodies, both local, continental and global to contribute to agribusiness development in Africa. (AAIN.)

They do this through their network whereby they create a platform by linking small-scale and large-scale farmers to different actors. They first identify the farmer's needs through assessments and through finding out about the right farm product that can be grown in the farm. They do this by partnering with institutions that surrounds a community in question to find out about the latest reserach done related to agriculture and agribusiness. They then, find the missing links and help farmers reach their potential. They put farmers in the centre.

AAIN as a network act as a bridge between farmers and the different actors mentioned above. For example, they work with private sectors dealing with agriculture locally, to train farmers and find markets for their products. In addition, they work with universities to train students doing agricultural courses to prepare them for agribusiness after graduation i.e. projects like 'Learn As You Earn'. Furthermore, AAIN as a network work

with the governments to promote development through training people to get involved in agriculture and agribusiness. Nevertheless, they work with financial institutions to support farmers in agribusiness by giving them loans. Finally, they work with other partners globally to provide the right technology to farmers who deal with agribusiness. (AAIN.)

4.2 The Agribusiness Conference

The place where data was collected was in Dakar, Senegal. AAIN had arranged an Agribusiness Conference involving Youths and Women in Agribusiness. Below were the details of the conference.

Table 1: Shows the order of events in the conference (was prepared by AAIN and other Hosts)

Topic	“Youth Engagement in Agribusiness Trade and Investment” Investing in Youth Innovations and Technology to Transform Agriculture
Dates	7 th -9 th March 2018
Venue	Dakar, Senegal (Host Country)
Organizers and Partners	African Agribusiness Incubators Network (AAIN), Cheick Anta DIOP/Dakar University, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources (AU-IBAR), Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA), Central Council for Agricultural Research and Development (CORAF), African Development Bank (AfDB) and Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO) Partners: Africa Rice, Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), The International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), Africa Lead, African Union Commission Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture (AU-DREA), AU-IBAR, European Investment Bank (EIB), and West Bengal (WB).
Who will participate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth delegates from across Africa • Women Innovators in Agribusiness • Youth in Agribusiness Networks

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers, cooperatives and farmer associations • NGO and Civil Society Groups • Academia, Researchers • ICT Developers and Hackers
Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incubators • Private Sector companies • Development partners • Donor Community • Government Agencies • Venture Capitalists, • Investors and Commodity Vendors • Business Development Leaders • Start-ups Incubates and Incubator Managers • Financiers and Banking Institutions,
What to expect from the conference and expo	<p>This event will inform and envision strategies for private and public engagement in delivering solutions towards CAADP Malabo Declaration, SDGs and Agenda 2030, the African Union Agenda 2063 and other global development goals. This peer to peer platform will be used to promote accelerated learning and exchanging knowledge between young innovators, showcase examples of innovative approaches, business models and technologies adopted by other countries, private businesses/social enterprises. Youth, Women and Farmer Networks will use the process to build strategies, coalitions, partnerships and explore innovative agribusinesses solutions and technologies from across Africa and abroad. The process will allow youths, women, SMEs, Development Actors to interact with innovators and experts to learn about how to manage business challenges, technologies and finance.</p>

From my point of view, the conference was very productive in that, it was attended by most of the participants, and most of the events went as planned. There were great workshops, farm product exhibitions, start-up pitching events, incubators trainings, PowerPoint presentations etc. As a student volunteer in the conference, I was given a chance to be part of the presenters on the title, ‘the need to include media to promote the

importance of agribusiness in women economic empowerment'. In addition, I was part of the knowledge management (KM) team organized by AINN's partner CTA (Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation). The main tasks of the knowledge management (KM) team was to gather all the information from the conference and analyse it at the end the day. This was to find out if the conference met their objectives or not. The feedback from the analysis was given to the organizers of the conference later after the conference. This was a good experience to me because there was a lot to learn that was used in this study.

4.3 Data Collection

The main research questions for this study were: What are the main challenges women face in doing small-scale agriculture and agribusiness in the rural areas of Africa? How agribusiness incubation process is applied to overcome these challenges and promote sustainable economic empowerment to the women involved in small-scale agriculture and agribusiness?.In this study, I interviewed women who had come to the conference and were doing small-scale agribusiness. I wanted to find out about their experiences in agribusiness and the challenges they face. In the conference, there were alot of presentations about agribusiness development. My main focus was on agribusiness incubation, I wanted to know how it works and how it has been used to help women improve on their businesses and promote sustainable economic empowerment more so to those women who live in the rural areas of Africa.

The data of this study was collected during the agribusiness conference organized by AAIN and its partners in Dakar,Senegal in March 2018. Firstly, it was done through individual interviews whereby, the target group were those who attended the conference and were women who do small-scale agribusiness, women agribusiness innovators, agribusiness incubators and incubator managers. I chose this group because, they were women and had experience in small-scale agribusiness and knew how agribusiness incubation works. Ten interviews were conducted. Among those interviewed were: Three women agripreneuers, two women agribusiness innovators, three agribusiness incubators trainers, two women agribusiness ICT(Information and Communication Technology) experts and financial supporters.

The interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended (refer to appendix 2). This is because it allows new ideas to be brought up during the interview. Another reason is that, the interviewees has been known to tell more about something without restrictions. Semi-structured interviews, in particular, have attracted interest and are widely used. This interest is linked to the expectation that the interviewed subjects' viewpoints are more likely to be expressed in an openly designed interview situation than in a standardized interview or a questionnaire.(Flick 2009,151.) Below is a figure showing the list of the interviewees who paticipated in this study.



Figure 4: *Showing the group of interviewees (Source: Researcher)*

Secondly, the data was collected through note-taking of PowerPoint presentations and workshops made by guests from different sectors including: (incubators trainers; private sector companies; development partners; donor community; government agencies; financiers and banking institutions; investor and commodity ventures; start-ups, incubates and incubator managers; and business development leaders). Any other content related to the research was also written down and recorded by the researcher. PowerPoint slides from the presenters related to the study were also requested by the researcher at the end of the presentations.

4.4 Data Analysis

Thematic content analysis was used in this research. (Glenwick et al 2016, 34-35) states that, ‘thematic analysis is a method for analysing qualitative data that involves searching for recurring ideas (referred to as themes) in a data set’. Thematic analysis helps identify common ideas across interviews. It also provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data because of its theoretical freedom (Braun et al 2006,78.) I worked with interview data, written notes and PowerPoint presentations from the conference to inductively derive themes that emerged.

An inductive or bottom-up approach means the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves (as such, this form of thematic analysis bears some similarity to grounded theory). In this study the, I was careful not to make conclusions on the themes before studying them carefully and find the meaning of each words written.I first read through all the responses and notes written, then started coding for similar answers, then I worked on sub-themes and major themes formed.And through inductive analysis, I was able to code data without using my own analytical preconception or fitting them in the existing coding frame.(Braun et al 2006,77) argues out that, thematic analysis should be data driven and not researcher’s theoretical interest in the area or topic. Below are the stages on how data analysis of this study was done.

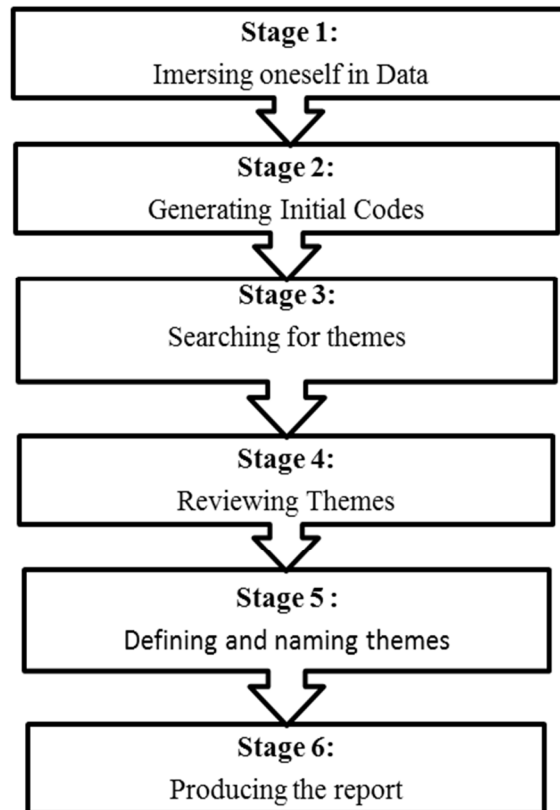
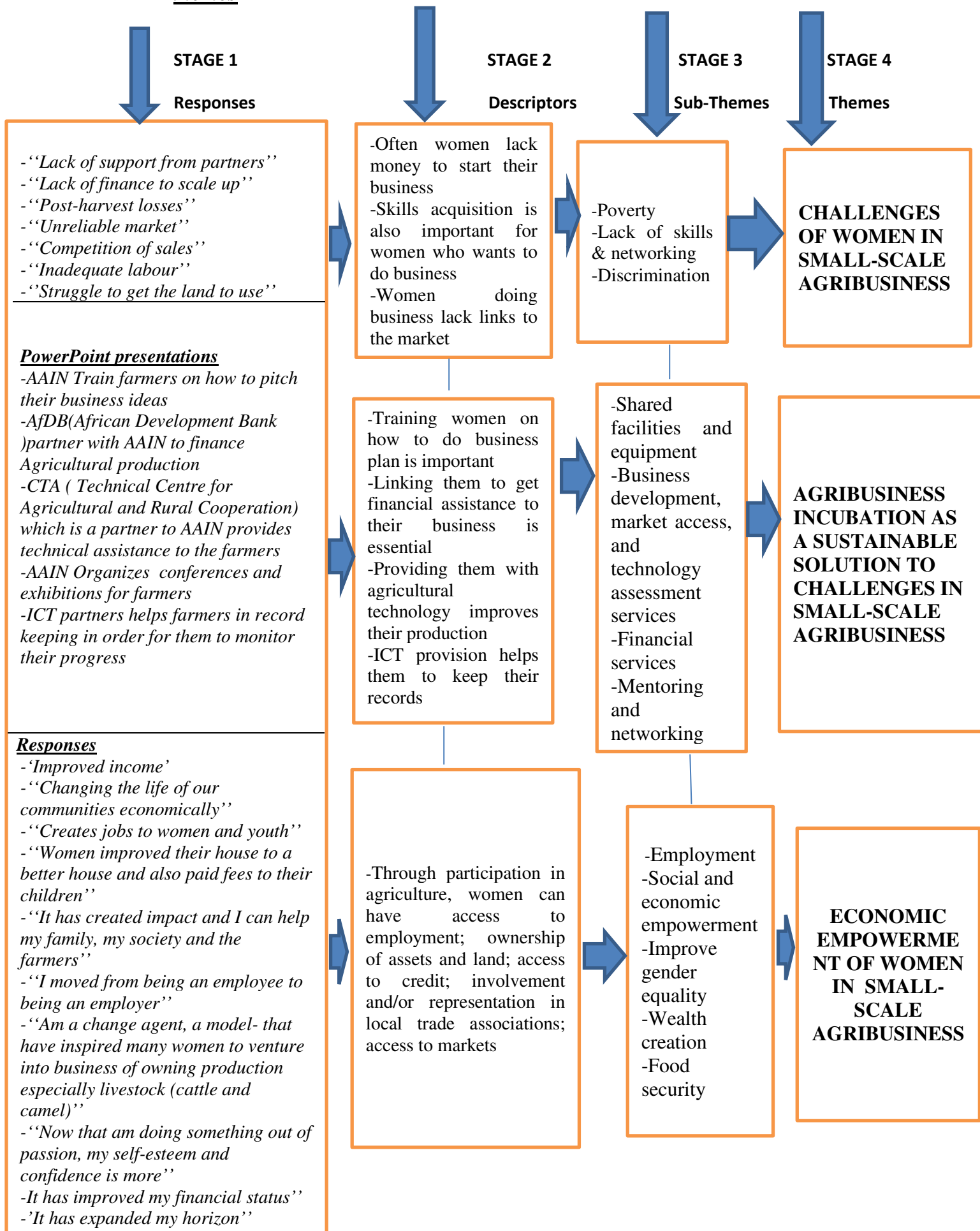


Figure 5: Shows the process of data analysis(Source:Glenwick et al 2016 pg-34-35)

Stage 1-Shows the responses made by the respondents and the notes taken during presentations by different speakers. Stage 2-Describes the important points from the responses and notes taken in stage 1. Stage 3- Identifies the sub-themes emerging from the description in stage 2. Stage 4- Depicts the main themes formed from the sub-themes in stage 3.

Figure 6: Shows the stages of data analysis from the raw data to the emerging themes



4.1 Ethical Considerations

In every research, there are some ethical guidelines. According to (Glenwick et al 2016,18) he states that, regardless of discipline, it is crucial that qualitative researchers follow all applicable professional and personal ethical guidelines to protect the well-being, confidentiality, and dignity of those who choose to participate in studies, those who elect not to participate, and those who will receive the research products. First and foremost, researchers must be sure to have sufficient knowledge and skills to apply their chosen data collection and analysis methods. They especially must consider their role in relation to their participants, to the community, and to the topic of interest.

The research permission from researcher's institution (Diaconia University) was not needed in this study. Permission to collect data was requested from AAIN as a target community. Before the interview, the participants were approached and those who accepted to participate were given an informed consent letter. Together, the researcher and the participants went through the informed consent letter before they sign it. All the participants were assured of their confidentiality and respect of their dignity throughout the process. They were also informed that, their confidential information will only be accessed by the researcher and the supervisor. They were also assured that, their identification were not to be indicated, but initials were to be used. After the data was collected, it was kept in a safe and confidential place. When the final write up was done, all the data were destroyed by the researcher.

5 RESULTS

From the results of this study three broad themes emerged: a). Challenges of women in small-scale agribusiness b). Agribusiness incubation as a sustainable solution to challenges in small-scale agribusiness c). Economic empowerment of women in small-scale agribusiness. The above results will be described theme by theme.

5.1 Challenges of Women in Small-Scale Agribusiness

From the results of this study, it shows that most small-scale women farmers face a lot of challenges in doing agriculture and agribusiness. The responses from the interviews included:

“Lack of support from partners whom I partnered with before that also do agricultural activities”

About three-quarters of the women who were interviewed and were doing small-scale agribusiness confessed that, they were not able to get the support from other agribusiness partners. Most of them were struggling alone. And therefore, they had come to the conference to learn on how to create networks with other agribusiness partners to improve on their businesses. They believed that, having strong partners who can work with them will improve their businesses and be able to scale up. Agribusiness partners are financial institutions, farmer cooperatives, research institutions, individual farmers, government (ministry of agriculture) and those that deals with agriculture and agribusiness. They further said that, partners can be a good way to network and get to know other new markets/opportunities to explore.

“Lack of finance to scale up. I would want my business to grow big, but I need more money to put into my business”

Due to poverty, most of the women who were involved in agriculture lacked capital or enough money to boost their business to the highest level i.e. internationally to even globally. Most of them started with low capital and therefore needed more support to go further. Among those interviewed were women coming from the rural areas where the level of poverty is high, and the only source of income is to do agriculture for commercial use.

They claimed that, getting a source of capital was a challenge to them and from their stories, they described how they ended up on the level they were at that time. Some struggled with the little they had, because they could not get trusted to get the loan from any financial institution. And that is still a challenge to many women that were interviewed.

“Am faced with post-harvest losses. I work so tirelessly in my farm only to get losses at the end due to poor market as I don’t have where to keep them”

About half of the women interviewed in this study faced a lot of post-harvest losses. This means that, the crops harvested get spoiled due to lack of market and poor storage facilities. The respondents concluded that, having good storage facilities prevents products from being damaged as it waits for the market. They claimed that, post-harvest loss is the worst disaster that hits farmers often, which results in a lot of disappointments to farmers. Due to this factor, most of them found it expensive to get good storage facilities and this was a great challenge to them because they could not afford.

“Unreliable market, we work to get enough and good quality products, but we don’t have a place to sell them because of the fluctuation of prices and low demand”

Most of the women interviewees complained about the unreliable market. This is where they harvest crops and face a sudden fluctuation of market prices. And therefore, they have nowhere to sell or end up selling their products at throw away prices. Most of them said they could sell it locally at a low price. They claimed that, finding market beforehand was the most essential thing before the products get ready. Some said that, the fluctuation comes sometimes due to political climate, regulatory and legislative climate and some might be due to other competitors having the same product in the market.

“We get competition in our sales because most farmers produce and sell similar products”

Most of the respondents could face competition of sales in their agricultural products. The reason they gave was that, most people could produce the same product and could flood in the market with cheap prices. So, they end up in a loss rather than making profit. They claimed that, the competitors were those who had similar product but had advanced technology and innovation. In addition, other competitors included those who had enough

money to work on the quality and quantity of their products, hence overcomes those of low quality and quantity.

“Inadequate labour. Farming requires a lot of work and not everybody likes to work in the farm. Therefore, we lack workers to help in the farm and it delays the whole process.”

Some of the women respondents who had a lot of work to do in their farms faced a shortage of labour. This is where they lacked people to hire, or then they find it expensive to hire them. They claimed that, most people will fear to get employed to the farm due to the nature of the work and low pay. So, they preferred to work elsewhere than the farm. They also claimed that, few people will prefer to stay in rural areas for farm employment, but many others will choose to stay in urban centres for better jobs without much struggle. Due to this perception most of the women employers in agriculture were lacking enough workers in their farms and therefore caused a lot of challenges in the process.

From the above responses, it shows how those women interviewed experienced a lot of challenges when trying to engage themselves in agribusiness. They are motivated to do agribusiness, but they lacked enough support in different areas. Most of their challenges were institutional, social, cultural and economic. Overcoming these challenges will mean investing in programs that will support women doing agribusiness.

5.2 Agribusiness Incubation as a Sustainable Solution to Challenges in Small-Scale Agribusiness

From the results of this study, it shows how agribusiness incubation works to offer sustainable solutions to the challenges faced by small-scale agribusinesses. Through the PowerPoint presentations made by different actors in agribusiness they were able to demonstrate the incubation process. AAIN as a network arranged a conference that was meant to cater for the farmer's needs. The conference was meant for the farmers to network and gain more knowledge on how to improve on their businesses. AAIN was able to invite presenters from different sectors. These included: financial institutions, technical centres providing technical assistance for farmers, ICT institutions dealing with farmer's record keeping and many others. AAIN also arranged for workshops which included

pitching (trying to persuade someone to do something i.e. pitching to investors) of agribusiness idea plans for winner awards and sponsorship. Through the conference, the women farmers and other women were able to network and share their experiences in farming where experts could provide the necessary help needed through training on how to overcome their challenges and improve their businesses. The farmers were also able to display their products during the exhibition event.

Therefore, through the PowerPoint presentations (refer to Appendix 3 on PowerPoint topics) and workshops done by these key players in the conference, I was able to write notes on how these actors demonstrated how they help women doing small-scale agribusinesses. From the notes taken in the conference, the results showed that:

-AAIN (African Agribusiness Incubators Network) train farmers on how to pitch their ideas and to act as a network between the different players in the agricultural sector.

AAIN as the host and as a network, presented on how to pitch agribusiness idea plans and get funded for. They highlighted the major steps in pitching which convinces the funders or investors. AAIN has been organizing a lot of pitching competitions in different countries targeting the agribusiness start-ups and small-scale agribusiness who can pitch their business ideas to the funders or investors hosted by them. AAIN was able to tell their successes of how they have helped a lot of start-ups. AAIN focus mostly on the women and youths doing agribusiness. During the conference, they were able to train student participants from the host university, youths and women who attended the conference. Those who had agribusiness ideas were able to pitch it, get assessed and the winners were given the award. Those who were trained during the conference were also given the certificates.

-AAIN organizes conferences and exhibitions for farmers to network and display their products

AAIN's conferences and exhibitions have helped farmers to network and exhibit their products, the forum has helped the farmers to get the right targets and get their products exposed. Most of the small-scale farmers who attended the conference brought their farm products to the conference for exhibitions and were able to tell how they have been packaging and selling them locally. Talking about the real product was easy to explain and it

created more interest to the people. People were able to see it, touch it, smell it and perhaps taste it if it was edible. Those interested included funders, farmers with interest to do the same, consumers of those products, researchers etc.

-AfDB (African Development Bank) partner with AAIN to finance Agricultural production

AfDB, a partner to AAIN is an institution that provide financial support to farmers. During the conference they presented on how they finance agriculture, they were able to tell on how they coordinate the activities of various agribusiness incubation programs to boost the role of women and youth in agricultural development in Africa. In addition, they presented on how they finance agriculture and agribusiness projects that promotes food security and sustainability in Africa. They went further to demonstrate how they provide funds for development projects like market research, feasibility studies, business plan, environmental and social impact studies.

-CTA (Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation) which is a partner to AAIN provides technical assistance to the farmers

CTA which is the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation is also a partner to AAIN. CTA provides technical assistance to the farmers. During the conference, CTA as a body was able to present on how technology is important to agriculture. They explained how they support small-scale farmers in rural areas of Africa. They stated that, most of the farmers have the right type of product to work on but they lack technology to improve or to add value to their product. They concluded that CTA was the solution to the challenges of technology. Their focus is to increase profitability and productivity by leveraging digital solutions and strengthening business innovations. They promote agricultural solutions to small-scale farmer by doing data gathering using drones and satellites, offering weather information and soil sensors etc. They work with a network of partners regionally, nationally and globally.

-ICT (Information, Communication Technology) partners help farmers in record keeping for them to monitor their business progress

AAIN as a network was able to invite various ICT partners to demonstrate on how ICT works in farming. ICT presentation was about how to do record-keeping in the farm followed by its importance. They presented about how it is beneficial for a farmer to keep a

record of their produce so that by the end of the period, they can calculate their profits or losses. There were various ICT innovations that were presented that supported small-scale farmers to overcome their challenges that included: a drive that provides small-scale farmers access to credit and some apps that help farmers find market to their products. They made a conclusion that ICT need to be included in agriculture because innovations create employment and promote food security as well as sustainable development.

The results showed how these actors are working hard to meet the needs of the farmers who do agribusiness. This is because, agribusiness incubation is about the provision of shared facilities and equipment; business development, market access, and technology assessment services; financial services; and mentoring and networking.

5.3 Economic Empowerment of Women in Small-Scale Agribusiness

From the responses made by some women who were already doing agribusiness, they were able to tell their successes despite their challenges mentioned earlier. According to most of them, their successes had created impact in their lives. The responses below show how their engagement in agribusiness had helped them.

“I moved from being an employee to being an employer. It was a bit of a struggle in the beginning but now it is better. I feel I have helped myself and other people”

The response above shows how some women involved in agribusiness had experience a change in their situation from being employees to self-employed or being employers of other employees. They were able to tell how they started alone and how they got to hire other workers in their farms. According to their responses, most of them had a great challenge in getting a source of income, and therefore, they discovered that agriculture was the main way to earn a living. Through getting involved in agriculture and agribusiness, most of them were able to improve on their statuses to even creating an impact in the communities around by employing others. They concluded that, getting involved in agribusiness provides employment and independency.

“Now that am doing something out of passion, my self-esteem and confidence is more”

Most women whom I interviewed did agriculture and agribusiness out of passion. They did it because they liked doing it, and nobody forced them to be farmers. Most of them said that, agriculture is not something that everybody will love doing it since it involves a hard and dirty work to do. But because they liked doing it, it made them confident and persistent. They went further to say that, women who are unemployed live with low-self-esteem and therefore, they lack exposure to so many things, more so to those living in the rural areas. Those women that were involved in agriculture and agribusiness out of passion found the support they needed easily from different sectors. They agreed that, getting involved in agribusiness trainings and programs boosts one's self-esteem and confidence which is part of the social empowerment.

“Am a change agent, a model- that have inspired many women to venture into business of owning production especially livestock (cattle and camel)”

Social change is an important aspect in one's life. The above response shows how agribusiness can create employment and generate wealth. Also, it shows the change of roles where women become owners of property as well as the great mentors to other women. From the responses, I found out that most women did not have a share of property because they claimed that most of the men were termed as the owners of the property following their cultural norms and believes. But through getting involved in agribusiness they were able to own property and became proud of their hard work. They regarded this as an achievement that can be shared to other women.

“It has created impact and I can help my family, my society and the farmers”

From the response above, most women who were involved in agribusiness had experienced a great impact and they were happy to share with other women and to those who were interested in agribusiness. Before they ventured into agribusiness, they were able to tell their bitter stories that they faced before becoming successful. Most of them talked about how their situation were before and how they could not be able to support their families. They were able to talk about the poverty level in rural areas of Africa where agriculture was the only source of income. Most of them were doing agriculture in small-scale just for own consumption. But still they could not be able to do sustainable agriculture because of lack of knowledge and skills as well as the proper resources. Having learned about agribusiness, they were able to participate in the programs which helped them to learn a lot about how to start a business in agriculture. They got challenges in the

beginning because of lack of capital and support from different agricultural sectors but their main goals were to go ahead despite the challenges. After being successful, they were proud to have helped their societies and other farmers.

6 DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The main purpose of this study was to explore on ways to promote sustainable economic empowerment of women in the rural areas of Africa, where the practice of agriculture is regarded as the main economic activity and a source of income. The three themes that emerged from the results of this study will be discussed at length in relation to the theories.

6.1 Women Challenges in Small-Scale Agribusiness

The women respondents expressed their challenges in agribusiness which included lack of financial assistance, lack of support, lack of cheap labour and many more. Most of the women claimed that, they started their small-scale agribusiness individually with small capital and the available resources. From their responses, it showed that, getting involved in agribusiness has its own challenges and how to overcome them depends on several factors.

6.1.1 Poverty

Three quarters of the women interviewed in this study came from poor areas of Africa. Poverty as depicted is still a great challenge in the rural areas of Africa and therefore, getting a source of income needs an extra effort. Agriculture seems to do best in rural areas and can be easily converted to a source of income. Doing this will need a lot of work from the experts that could offer training to the farmers willing to do agribusiness. Most of the rural farmers have been working on their farms only for consumption. But agribusiness is doing farming for commercial services.

Because of poverty, most farmers are not able to do agribusiness because they lack capital to start their business. Mostly, it affects women whom their work is just to stay at home and do household duties. By showing them ways to get capital, like introducing them to financial institutions to start working on agribusiness, it will improve the status of their families and the society at large. In many rural African areas where small-scale agriculture takes place, researchers have found that gender, class, and age differences have a significant impact on resource allocation and productivity in agricultural group formation

for commercial crop production. Under these systems, women are expected to conform to their ‘traditional’ role as wives, mothers, and caregivers and to remain working in menial positions.” (Manzanera-Ruiz et al 2016, 7.)

Gender inequality has caused an immense poverty all over the world. This means there is a general lack of basic needs in life of a person. This situation has been worse in the developing world, where it is estimated that, 24 percent of the population lives in abject poverty. The provision of micro credit schemes in developing countries has contributed to the fight of poverty among marginalised groups, particularly women. (Atieno 2017, 21.)

Women’s economic status has been a challenge to those living in the rural areas of Africa. Most of them live in poverty and lack the opportunities to improve their sources of income. Women are termed as the most vulnerable. According to (World Bank 2017,) the involvement of firms can work towards addressing the women challenges and constraints in agriculture and convert them into business successes. And if firms invest in women’s agribusiness, they can bridge the productivity gaps as they increase their sales and reduce poverty.

6.1.2 Women Discrimination in Terms of Rights

From the previous research, it is evident that women are far behind men regarding agricultural productivity in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is due gender inequalities that persist in respect of access to, control over and utilization of productive resources such as land, livestock, labour, education, extension and financial services, and technology. Most women are discriminated in owning land which is severe in Sub-Saharan Africa. Cultural norms and traditions restrict women’s ability to inherit land and contribute to widening gender gaps in the quality and size of owned farmland. (Diirro et al 2018, 2.)

According to the research done in South Africa, women face discrimination in the distribution of resources essential for success in the agribusiness sector even when they contribute immensely to the industry. Such challenges include access and control of land, accessibility to inputs and assets, markets for the farm produce, lack of information and knowledge, inefficient utilization of resources. Additionally, women lack enough time as

they tend to families and decision-making authority is placed with their male counterparts. (Statistics South Africa & South Africa Department of Agriculture, 2000.) Women farmers control less land and have not adopted improved farming technology as well as minimal access to farm inputs such as fertilizers. Additionally, they have limited access to insurance and credit and are less likely to receive extension services.

(World Bank 2011) states that, recognising and taking account of the differences between women and men in terms of their resources, time availability and technical expertise makes good business sense. Evidence demonstrates that greater attention to identifying and addressing the differing constraints, needs and priorities of rural women and men, as well as differences between younger and older women and men, in the design and delivery of services or labour recruitment results in improved productivity and higher rates of economic growth. Moreover, with women over-represented among those living at the bottom of wealth pyramid – especially households headed by women – there is further justification for gender-differentiated approaches on the grounds of poverty reduction.

(Manzanera-Ruiz et al 2016, 5) argues that, practitioners and development policy makers who offer support to women need to be aware of gender constraints which include restricted access to land, level of poverty, time constraints and limited mobility due to social attitudes. Therefore, they need to access either on how men have power over women which is understood as dominion, or focus on the power that women need to act, which is understood as empowerment. Some social scientists and policymakers tend to believe that, gender equality improves when poverty declines. Policymakers should therefore focus on creating the conditions for economic growth and prosperity, while seeking to maintain a level where both genders can thrive. (Duflo 2012, 4.)

6.1.3 Lack of Network and Agribusiness Skills

From the interviews, the respondents demonstrated how they lacked network and proper agribusiness skills. Many of the women in rural areas are illiterate and mostly stay at home and so, they are not exposed to opportunities than men, who normally work outside home. So, training them to work on their business plans and mentoring them on how to proceed is a good strategy to help them have the confidence and motivation needed to work on agribusiness and produce positive results. This involves bringing in different

actors together to cater for the women's needs. These players need to be from different sectors within the community that could bring their expertise in agribusiness especially if it is women empowering. This will include doing research to find out the farm product that works better and has a good market at that time. This will help them know what to work on in advance to avoid planting something that end up having a poor market.

According to (World Bank 2011,) there is growing recognition that the standard approaches to addressing women economic empowerment have not been enough; more needs to be done – and to be done differently – to achieving lasting benefits for improving the quality of life for rural women and their families. This involves moving beyond treating the symptoms of gender inequality, such as unequal access to resources and benefits, to addressing the underlying causes which are deeply rooted in gender norms, attitudes and behaviours, power relations and social institutions.

6.2 Agribusiness Incubation as a Sustainable Solution to Agribusiness Challenges.

From the results it shows how incubation works and how women in small-scale agribusiness are involved. Agribusiness incubation entails different actors coming in to engage and help farmers to overcome challenges in agribusiness. Agribusiness incubation is a new strategy which has helped many small-scale farmers in agribusiness to scale up their farming business in Africa. They provide the necessary skills, equipment and materials that are useful in agriculture and agribusiness. From the responses, women involved in agribusiness incubation have seen a lot of improvement in their businesses.

6.2.1 Mentoring, Access to Network and Shared Facilities

From the presentations in the conference, different experts were demonstrated on how they have helped farmers using their own expertise. AAIN as a network was able to provide a platform where the farmers could network and get mentored. Women who were doing small-scale agribusinesses were able to extend their networks and benefited from the content of the conference. In addition, they were given a chance to share their experiences in their businesses. They were able to mention their challenges and successes.

According to (Hernández et al 2016,2,) business incubators are organizations that create value by providing support such as facilitation services to assist potential startups and Small and Medium Enterprises(SMEs) to develop sustainable businesses. They provide different services mainly integrated in three dimensions: facilities, coaching, and access to networks. They seek to establish interdependencies to get access to such resources. Business incubators interdependencies are seen as strategic partnerships that may contribute to increase sustainable business development to clients by improving businesses reducing socio-economic issues e.g., income inequalities and poverty.

Business incubators create networks and partnerships with universities, governments, private sectors and industries so that they get access to the needed resources which is related to business incubators. In developing countries, business incubators and its partners provide resources like new technologies, experts providing counseling and access to networks from various individuals (Hernández et al 2016,2.)

To promote agriculture's contribution, industry's linkages should be strengthened. These include: value-addition and agro-processing, providing farm inputs, improving post-harvest facilities, providing better storage facilities, and better distribution and logistics. All these are the main elements of value chains in agribusiness. They contribute to economic growth and reduction of poverty. Also, it provides improvement in technical skills and capacity as well as structural transformation of economies. (Yumkella et al 2011, 26-27.)

6.2.2 Business Development, Market Access, and Technology Assessment Services

Business development, market access, and technology services are important in agribusiness. CTA which is the Technical Centre for Agricultural and rural Cooperation presented about the importance of the right technology in agribusiness. Most of the women faced a lot of challenges in farming including lack of storage facilities and inadequate labour. Getting the right technology could help minimise the post-harvest losses. Also getting the right technology will make their work easier rather than relying on the human labour alone.

There is need to inspect the role of agricultural mechanization in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to (FAO 2008) analysis, they found out that, there is a strong correlation between economic growth and mechanization of agriculture. Those countries with good economic growth and food security have advanced agricultural mechanization, and those with poor economic growth and still live in poverty have not improved their agricultural mechanization. African agriculture will need improved technology from old manual ones to new power-intensive operations in order to improve on the productivity and competitiveness at the same time provide employment and reduce poverty. (Yumkella et al 2011, 42- 43.)

Different actors in agribusiness incubators encourage and help farmers and researchers to come up with new innovations and business plans that can help farmers become competitive in the market. According to the (World Bank 2011,) the potential of agricultural growth to reduce poverty is four times greater than the potential growth from other sectors. The creation of a competitive indigenous agribusiness sector requires an effective innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem that enables the start-up and growth of innovative enterprises. Good infrastructure, effective policies and regulations and access to appropriate financing are critical enablers. In addition, access to and adoption of innovation along with entrepreneurial skills will be critical to advancing the sector.

6.2.3 Access to Financial Services

Access to financial services are important in agribusiness. Most women who were interviewed expressed their struggle in finding capital to start their businesses. They claimed that, if they go individually to borrow the loans, they were denied because of security reasons and lack of trust. So, by having women in incubators, they are easily linked to the financial institutions. This is because, the registered networks like AAIN are trusted more than an individual person, and therefore they can link them easily. African Development Bank has helped a lot of farmers involved in agribusiness to get access to loans through the incubator's networks.

Expanding women's economic opportunities means: more and better jobs for women across a wider range of sectors; a business climate that supports women in starting and growing businesses, and building their management and entrepreneurial skills; a financial

sector in which commercial banks and microfinance institutions provide women with effective access to a range of financial services and products tailored to their needs, including especially credit and savings instruments; and, in times of high food and fuel prices, greater livelihood security for women, especially in rural areas and vulnerable environments. Securing women's legal rights, including respect to land and other property, is an indispensable component of their empowerment and a core foundation for economic activity. Similarly, ensuring that women's voices are heard in the economic arena, and that their priorities are not only heard but also acted on, is both a means to, and an end of, their economic empowerment. Working together across these areas, for example where securing women's land rights has a direct impact on their ability to access finance, has an important multiplier effect for MDG3 and for all the MDGs (UNDP 2008, 9.)

6.2.4 Importance of ICT in Agribusiness

Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) is important in agribusiness because, it helps the farmers make a record of their progress in agribusiness. Most of the women that were interviewed didn't have access to ICT and therefore, they didn't know how their businesses were progressing. ICT experts mentioned about the importance of tracing the available market through ICT. Lack of market was one of the challenges women faced in agribusiness, and through ICT it makes it easier for the women to know the available markets for certain products in advance. It saves time as one doesn't need to travel far to look for market. (Ozor 2013,243) believed that, incubators bring together various players in agribusiness sector including researchers, farmer cooperatives and societies, universities, technical institutes, product transporters, food suppliers, entrepreneurs, business strategists, and financiers. These players work together for the good of the farmers in agribusiness.

The emergence of new technology and indigenous knowledge is used to promote sustainable agriculture and thus, it needs adjustments in existing institutions. This means that, there should be a close interaction between farmers, business, government, civil society and academia. In many African countries, most of the agricultural activities are dominated by small-scale farmers. As a result of this, the adoption of new technology and information is slow. So, the main challenge is how to transfer technology from knowledge producers to small-scale farmers in rural areas. (Juma 2011, 50.)

6.3 Economic Empowerment of Women in Small-Scale Agribusiness

From the results, the respondents demonstrated how they have gained a lot in doing agribusiness which includes; their situation being changed after a certain period. They believed that agribusiness had helped them overcome some challenges. They were happy because their economic statuses and their ownership of property had changed. In addition, they demonstrated how they are able to provide for their families rather than relying more on their spouses.

6.3.1 Promoting Gender Equality

Gender inequality has been a challenge mostly affecting women in rural areas of Africa. Most women face discrimination and violence. They are also discriminated in economic participation. Men are the most dominant in terms of employment. Due to cultural barriers women are assumed to only take care of the home duties. So, they don't have a chance to explore on the possible income generating opportunities that can match their abilities. (Bishop 2017, 19) believes that, many gender mainstreaming initiatives focus on the economic aspects of women's empowerment, ensuring they have access to inputs and technical advice and, have a voice in decision-making bodies, which contribute to short-term productivity gains. However, for benefits to be sustainable in the longer term, women want to work not only productively, but they also need to be motivated by having a voice in how the income they generate is spent. They want the quality of their lives to be improved, to reduce the time they spend on unpaid domestic and care work, and to be free from gender-based violence.

In recent years, women have been playing an increasing role as drivers of growth in many of the world's economies, however, little is known about the gendered influences on the experiences and the subsequent contributions of growth-oriented female entrepreneurs at country level. Women's participations and contributions in economic activities are also limited to specific sectors. For instance, in Africa most female entrepreneurs are particularly found in agriculture and informal businesses and their contribution to the local economy is difficult to measure. Their ability to establish businesses and grow new ones, generate employment and improve productivity is often hampered by formal and

institutional constraints governing their societies. Despite such realisation, these institutions are rarely explored and, in most cases they are treated as unproblematic sites that exist to manufacture businesses. (Kyaruzi, 2008, 41.)

In general, women play a significant role in agricultural production hence their empowerment will impact the economic position of women as well as the overall agrarian markets across national and international boundaries. An enhanced financial involvement of women in agribusiness leads to stronger, sustainable and inclusive economic growth. It is possible to empower women economically by improving their leadership and enhancing their managerial roles.

6.3.2 Social and Economic Empowerment

Social and economic empowerment is important to women. From the results of this study, the responses showed how women statuses changed socially and economically. Despite their struggle in their businesses, they demonstrated that they could afford a smile at the end. Many societies have failed to invest in women empowerment programs. The rate of unemployed women especially in the rural areas is still high. There are a lot of opportunities for women, but it seems there is lack of realization and commitment by the community that women can be part of social and economic development. If the communities could realize the benefits of women, they could invest more on the projects that promote social and economic empowerment.

In several decades, so much global efforts have been done to promote gender equality, social and economic empowerment, but labour market remains divided as far as gender is concerned. Men are believed to be dominating in high income businesses in different sectors around the world. For example, in agriculture, men dominate in high value cash crops businesses and, women participate more on food crops mainly subsistence farming. The lack of gender balance in labour force in agriculture especially in cash crop production, hinders economic empowerment particularly in rural economy where agriculture is the main economic activity as well as the source of income. (SOFA et al 2011,17.)

Currently, there are efforts towards empowering women economically, this is a good opportunity towards the reduction of poverty, economic growth and achievement of gender

equality goals. The economic independence will help women make their own decisions to better their community in terms of welfare, health and education. (World Bank 2017) states that, the global community should focus more on women's economic empowerment by investing in women to increase the labour force and earnings which will benefit the women, men, their children and the whole society.

Additionally, empowerment of agribusiness projects for women in less visible support roles in the agricultural and agribusiness sector is paramount to improving their performance in the industry thus leading to sustained economic growth for households and the overall economy of a nation. Improved knowledge on planting, maintenance, and harvesting of crops, as well as post-harvest preparation. Technology improvement in handling these processes is a critical move to empowering women economically and positively contributing to improved standards of living. (Okunlola & Adenmosun, 2017,9.)

6.3.3 Improvement on Food Security and Wealth Creation

When women are involved in agribusiness, they should be provided access to market to let their small-scale agribusiness to capitalize and flourish. Additionally, they should be given access to inputs and services as well as strengthening technical and entrepreneurial skills. All these will promote the economic status of the women in the society. (Kyaruzi 2008,41) believes that, business incubation has emerged as a cost-effective contributor to local economic development, so that, incubating female enterprises from early stage can give the businesses credibility; increase the likelihood of their survival and their abilities to build effective networks and access critical resources such as finance.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, agricultural innovation has been found to be a powerful means to address the low productivity and add value. It is argued out that, higher agricultural productivity is a demonstration of growth and development. And the high yields are a way to improve on incomes and reduce poverty, more so in rural areas. This is where the impact will be shown through the increase of smallholder incomes or increase in employment and wages. Agribusiness incubation is a new agricultural innovation in Africa and understanding how innovation takes place and developing policies and institutions that facilitate enhanced innovation are thus central to the process of

agricultural development on the African continent. (Agribusiness and Innovation Systems in Africa et al 2009, 8.)

The previous research shows that, empowering women can result in improvements in their status at home and outside home, which includes more control on household property and resources, improved mental health, increased access to financial services, reduced time constraints, increased access to health care, income-generating activities, skills development, more access to market information and legal rights. All these contributes towards a positive impact on agricultural productivity, food security and nutrition. Therefore, promoting gender equality in rural development promotes sustainable food security and poverty alleviation more so in Sub-Saharan Africa. (Diirro et al 2018, 2).

6.4 Reliability, Validity and Limitation of the Study

As a researcher, I used different approaches to make up this study. This included using interviews and notes from presentations made during the conference in order to get enough data for this research. The conference consisted of different expertise who could provide information needed in this study. Collecting data directly from the target clients who had already experienced the phenomenon of study was a sure way to get the right information. Also, I used the latest articles and current literature to make up this study. Additionally, I followed the guidelines of the research process to make sure this study is written accordingly.

Time was limited in the collection of data since the conference was only three days, therefore in future more time is needed during data collection in order to get enough content and understand more about the background of the respondents. In addition, getting to interview respondents from one community or culture may vary the results. This is because, in this study the respondents were from various backgrounds and cultures, therefore their responses varied accordingly. Moreover, it was a bit of work to analyze their responses as it included notes from various presenters. Furthermore, getting a large group of women will be ideal to come up with concrete themes. In this study, the respondents were few and therefore I struggled to join up the dots.

6.5 Self-Reflection

In my professional development, I learned a lot during the process. Writing a masters thesis is a step by step process. Going through literature and selecting a suitable topic was a starting process to ensure of its feasibility. Also, using the right methodologies and approaches to contribute about the reliability and validity of the study was a form of learning. The whole process contributed to my learning in terms of research skills. The guidance and expertise I got from my supervisors helped me learn a lot of things I did not learn in my previous research. The topic of my research was a new phenomenon to me and therefore exploring it was part of my learning. Diaconia University as my school and AIN as the target organization gave me the support needed to develop my research skills.

7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender inequality is a global issue and has been listed as one of the goals of sustainable development vision 2030. Most women in rural areas of Africa still face discrimination more so in economic contribution and empowerment. This is due to cultural or institutional barriers. Most men dominate in doing different activities especially when it comes to economic activities like agriculture. Women are assumed to stay at home and take care of the duties at home. Most of the agricultural activities that is done in the rural areas are mainly for consumption and few farmers do it for commercial services.

The respondents of this study were women who had resorted to do small-scale agriculture and agribusiness to earn a living. Despite getting involved in the business they still faced challenges in their work which included lack of markets, lack of networks, lack of right equipment, lack of skills, lack of capital and many other factors. On the other hand, some of the respondents demonstrated how their lives had changed since they started working in their small-scale agriculture and agribusiness.

According to the previous research, agribusiness incubation has been introduced to work on minimizing the challenges faced by those involved in agribusiness. AAIN together with other agricultural partners have introduced agribusiness incubators and networks in various parts of Africa countries, to train and offer support to small-scale and large-scale agribusiness to help them develop and scale-up (move to the next level) their businesses without many barriers.

When farmers are put into these incubators, they are offered the following services; they are trained on how to write a business plan, they are provided with the necessary technology, equipment and facilities needed in the farm, they are assisted in looking for market for their products, they are linked to financial institutions that provides loans, they are also mentored and linked with the right networks. This is done by bringing together different expertise in different fields to help agribusinesses overcome their challenges and grow their businesses. The previous research shows that, when women are involved in agribusiness and are put into these incubators, it helps them to minimize their challenges

and realize their successes in agribusiness. This will promote economic empowerment in women, because getting involved in agribusiness will help them generate income and become independent. Also, agribusiness incubation has been found to promote sustainable economic empowerment.

Despite having its advantages, agribusiness incubation has its own disadvantages too. This is because, incubation process needs a lot of investment of time and expenditure. Also, since agriculture is affected by biological factors, technological factors, perishability, lack of market and other factors, agribusiness incubators need to be smart enough to deal with these risks and help those involved in agribusiness to minimize them.

In this study, I found that agribusiness incubation is still a complicated strategy that needs to be simplified and dealt with step by step. The procedures followed in joining the incubators needs to be clear for those who need to join. Also, there should be more research on how agribusiness incubation works and how the results are realized. I, as the researcher of this study had limited literature on agribusiness incubation and its successes. More research needs to be done on how it is applied in small-scale agribusinesses that involves women.

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APPENDIX 1. A Consent Form

My name is Naomi Kering, a master student in Diakonia University of Applied Sciences in Finland. Am pursuing a Master programme of Community Development, Human Rights and Conflict Resolution. Am doing my master's thesis research on the topic, "Sustainable Solutions to Women's Economic Empowerment: Applying Agribusiness Incubation". Am collecting data for the purposes of my research. Your participation to this interview is voluntary, you are free to withdraw anytime without giving a reason and without cost. You are free to ask questions if something is not clear. Your name will be kept anonymous throughout the thesis process. The data that will be collected will be only for the purposes of this research and will be destroyed later by the researcher after the final write up. The data collected will not be shared to anyone.

By signing this consent form, I confirm that I have read and understood the information have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

Signature-----

Date-----

APPENDIX 2. Interview Questions

Name:----- Age: ----- Sex----- Occupation: -----

Country:-----

Three Women Agripreneuers,

1. What kind of agribusiness do you do?
2. Who are you engaged with in your business?
3. What kind of support do you get from partners?
4. What are your successes in doing agribusiness?
5. What are the challenges you face?
6. How has this business impacted your life?

Two Women Agribusiness innovators

1. What kind of agribusiness innovations do you have?
2. Are they women-initiated innovations?
3. How do you involve women in converting these innovations into business?
4. Have these innovations been put to practice? and how successful were they especially when working with women?

Three for Agribusiness Incubators,

1. What is agribusiness incubation?
2. How do you engage women in agribusiness through incubation?
3. What kind of services do you offer?
4. What kind of infrastructure is needed to ensure the success in agribusiness?
5. How do you find market for agricultural products produced?
6. What kind of trainings do you offer?

Two Women Agribusiness ICT and Financial Supporters.

1. What kind of support do you offer to women doing agribusiness?
2. What kind of procedures do you follow?
3. How has this support impacted on women economic status?

APPENDIX 3: PowerPoint Presentations

Presentation 1: African Agribusiness Incubators Network (AAIN) on their work and how to pitch for funding

Presentation 2: African Development Fund (AfDB) on financing agribusiness

Presentation 3: Information & Communication Technology (ICT) importance in Agribusiness

Presentation 4: Women in Agribusiness sharing their stories

Presentation 5: Networking, knowledge sharing and learning from each other