

## Introductory Remarks by Commissioner Phil Hogan at European Development Conference

### Phil Hogan at European Development Days

Dear friends, I welcome this opportunity to discuss how we can empower and strengthen the role of women in the context of developing the African rural economy.

This panel is very timely, given that we are now translating into concrete action the decisions taken at the 5th Africa-European Union Summit in Abidjan last November. The question of agriculture and rural development is very high on our joint agenda.

Agriculture plays a substantial role in the 2030 Agenda but we are still at the start of the long journey to achieve the **Sustainable Development Goals** at global level.

This gives agriculture and agricultural policy an opportunity to demonstrate it can be **part of the solution**, in the European Union and – even more so - in **Africa**.

I am very much aware of the role **women and girls** must play in our strategies if they are to succeed. We urgently need to find smarter ways to unleash their full potential in relation to rural development and farming.

#### **(Areas for Action)**

Let me focus on five areas where we need action to bridge the gap between opportunity and reality. These are five areas where we can deepen cooperate with our partners in Africa:

**(1) The first is skills and education:** In Africa, similarly to Europe, we need to focus on investing in skills and productive capacity. We must empower women and young people in particular with the necessary expertise to build careers in the sector. We need to facilitate their access to technology and capital, and we must support entrepreneurship and self-employment.

Policies and investments that tackle gender specific constraints and promote vocational education in agriculture and the food industry could have a particularly large impact on women's economic activities and in food security.

**(2) The second area for action is agri-business:** I very much support the project aiming to establish an Agribusiness Platform between the African Union and the European Union. This platform will strengthen the

links between the food and drink industry in Africa and Europe. Ultimately, it will also help African entrepreneurs, both women and men, both small holders and family farmers, by providing better access to markets.

**(3) The third area for action is in relation to quality products and geographical indications:** quality standards are important for market access and there is a lot of work to do together here. Quality is hugely important for European food production and it is an area where African farmers have a huge potential. African Union has developed a strategy for geographical indications, and we are happy to cooperate on that. Geographical indications products typically hold a higher export value, creating well remunerated jobs in local areas. This is an area where female entrepreneurship can be promoted and supported.

**(4) The fourth area for action is in relation to digital transformation:** new technologies and systems can radically improve agricultural productivity. We should aim to support the connectivity of smallholders to the internet, increase uptake of advisory services and extend the availability of e-Agriculture solutions – in Africa as well as in Europe.

**(5) The fifth area for action is in relation to research:** we should enhance collaborative research and innovation activities between Europe and Africa. This includes professional development and exchange programmes.

All these are ideas that were discussed at the Agriculture Ministerial Conference between the African Union and the European Union in July 2017. We are jointly bringing them forward.

And these are also part of the topics the **Task Force for Rural Africa** is charged with examining.

In collaboration with the African Union, we have already started re-thinking our traditional development cooperation models and, beyond development assistance and trade relations, we are now focusing on targeting policy support and political dialogue.

We are prioritising the fostering of responsible investment in rural areas, with the involvement of the private sector under the framework of the **External Investment Plan (EIP)**.

The EIP expects to mobilise huge investment - at least EUR 44 billion of investment in Africa and the European neighbourhood - by 2020.

As you know there will be a specific window under EIP for agriculture and agribusiness. It is also a priority of the African Union to transform

their agricultural sector in order to unlock its potential to help feed and employ an increasing population.

Now it is up to all key players of the private sector to join us in creating sustainable growth and decent jobs for the benefit of all.

But financial guarantees are only one part. Ensuring the right **business and regulatory conditions** for investment to flourish, is just as crucial to turn these prospective new investments into lasting ones.

Investment will create jobs, which will keep families in rural communities.

### **(Conclusion)**

In conclusion, we need to realise the potential of agriculture and tap the energy, ambition and know-how of young people and women. We can achieve this through sound public policies, as well as sustainable and responsible investments of the private sector in the agricultural value chain.

Successful development of the untapped employment and production potential in agriculture and the food economy requires well-rounded jobs strategies, in particular for youth and women, with a holistic approach aimed at supporting value chain development, integrated skills development and systems as well as improving the overall business climate are needed.

The challenge is enormous but so are the opportunities! Thank you.