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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Women in Agribusiness Leadership Network Conference
Remarks by USAID Deputy Mission Director Ramona El Hamzaoui
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
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It is an honor for me to be here this morning to open the second annual conference of the Women in Agribusiness Leadership Network.

As USAID's deputy mission director, I get to meet many Ethiopian women. Many of them are quiet and nervous if they are asked to speak in front of a group. Many also defer to their male colleagues when it comes time to voice ideas and make important decisions. This hesitancy to step forward and speak up is definitely a disadvantage, especially in the business environment.

Women are the backbone of Ethiopia's agricultural sector and make up half of the agricultural work force. And yet they still represent less than 15 percent of the membership of agricultural cooperatives countrywide, and they face a number of challenges. These include:

- less access to productive resources
- less access to training
- less access to market information
- and less mobility

A World Bank survey conducted in 2014 showed that less than half of the women interviewed said they make major decisions for their businesses, and network members confirmed that they face major challenges in finding and entering new markets and accessing credit.

These are just a few of the reasons why, under the U.S. Government's Feed-The-Future Initiative, USAID's Agribusiness Market Development and Livestock Market Development activities support the Women in Agribusiness Leadership Network.

But we can and are changing this. YOU are changing this! The Women in Agribusiness Leadership Network is a prime example of how to empower Ethiopian women who are working in a sector that is traditionally run by men.

I'm happy to say that progress is being made. As we wrap up the network's second year, let us celebrate our achievements.

The network reached more than 1,200 women entrepreneurs in the agriculture and agro-processing sectors. Over 900 of these women are mentees who were brought into the network with the help of existing members. The mentorship aspect not only empowers women at the community level, but provides the network with a wider base and a larger pool of talent of women leaders.

The network serves as a platform to help women entrepreneurs plan, manage and grow their businesses. As a result of their training, many have learned new business concepts such as business planning and marketing.

Today we honor those women.

The women entrepreneurs here today are all engaged in agriculture-related businesses—from food processors to livestock owners—from coffee growers to injera companies—ranging from the micro to the large-scale levels.

Sitting here are women specializing in production, processing, and exporting agricultural products. Commercial farmers as well as owners of dozens of *baltena* shops across the country. The list goes on.

Women traders and exporters are increasingly entering traditionally male-dominated agricultural export sectors such as coffee, sesame, maize and agricultural supplies.

Network members challenge agribusiness stereotypes in Ethiopia and are here to testify to a new model of leadership. Thanks to the Women in Agribusiness Leadership Network, you have increased your confidence and reduced your fears of speaking in public. Your ability to communicate is greater than ever.

These skills will make a difference every time you attempt to enter a new market, identify a potential new client, or apply for a loan.

This network gives me hope that I'll continue to encounter more and more Ethiopian women during my time here who will not be afraid to stand up and speak their opinions.

I hope the exchange of information, ideas and experiences at this conference will result in even greater successes for Ethiopia's women-led enterprises and future leaders.

With Ethiopia's focus on development, I think it would be appropriate to close with what the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan once said, "There is no development strategy more beneficial to society as a whole—women and men alike—than the one which involves women as central players."

Thank you and *amasegenalehu*.