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**Making an impact on food security, one farmer at a time**

**On the occasion of Women’s Day on 9 August, Kershni Maharaj, Head of Strategy, Dealer and Distribution Development – Africa, reflects on her passion to grow businesses in the agricultural sector and create jobs in local communities**

**Johannesburg, South Africa, 22 June 2021:** A seasoned executive, **Kershni Maharaj** joined AGCO Africa as a Senior Project Manager who successfully led her team in transitioning the business into a two-tier distribution model that is both customer-centric and profitable. She has decades of experience as an executive business strategist in assisting various businesses scale and achieve sustainable growth, and managing B-BBEE solutions for both large and small businesses.

Kershni cut her teeth refining strategic objectives and enhancing the value propositions of various companies in a range of sectors, including financial, mining and agricultural industries by reducing wasteful expenditure, reforming redundant projects and redesigning organisational structure. Her previous roles included COO for an NGO in the agricultural sector; Executive Head: Operations for a leading business incubator on the continent; Senior Strategist in Customer Experience and Divisional Head of B-BBEE for a commercial Bank.

Passionate about developing agriculture and improving food security in Africa, Kershni continues to run her own organisation that nurtures start-ups in the sector. She holds a qualification in the banking sector and an Advanced Diploma in Credit Management. “This was not my first choice, as I actually wanted to be a food technologist. But the opportunity to join the bank, a few months after matriculation, seemed much more exciting at the time. I knew that it was the right fit for me at that time and it paid off,” she explains.

Kershni’s transition from banking occurred after spending about 23 years with one financial institution. “I knew that I had more to give and that my purpose is to serve others and empower people to support and grow themselves. The best way I knew how to do this was through business development and entrepreneurship support.” Fast-forward to today, where Kershni says working in the agricultural sector allows her to extend her passion and purpose, enabling small- and large scale farmers to grow their businesses and contribute to food security and job creation in local communities.

After spending four years working with communities and developing agricultural businesses, Kershni was presented with an opportunity to join AGCO Africa. It was the perfect fit for her, working with a multinational corporation with an entrepreneurial culture. “The environment allows me to support farmers, through a network of partners, with smart mechanisation solutions, experienced and highly-skilled resources, state-of-the-art training facilities and a great overall customer experience.”

Commenting on the challenges of being a woman in male-dominated environments such as mining and agriculture, Kershni says: “Sometimes it feels like I am the odd one out, but I am quick to remind myself of my journey and the value I have to offer. There are very few women in senior or executive positions in the agricultural space. My approach is to always look at the opportunity, be the change agent and set an example for others to follow. It is important for women to lean in, be noticed and be heard. We are responsible for making that choice.”

Kershni adds: “Having spent time working with communities, it was encouraging to see women take the lead in farming projects. I have also had the opportunity to work with or engage with other women in agriculture. The common thread we all have is that we are the minority within our respective environments. However, our contribution is equal to that of our male counterparts.”

She explains that her leadership style is defined by the team she works with. “I strongly believe that you step into the role based on the circumstance and the position you need to take up. My leadership style is fluid and adaptable. I currently work with a highly skilled and motivated team that does not need to be managed. They deserve a leader that empowers them to deliver and achieve results based on our common goal.”

On a personal note, Kershni has always been inspired by **Nelson Mandela**. “I had the privilege of meeting him on more than one occasion. His humility inspires me to be kind, be great and do good every day.” In terms of her career, she admires Facebook COO **Sheryl Sandberg** and the role she has played in empowering women. A particular quote by Sheryl that resonates with Kershni is: “Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence and making sure that impact lasts in your absence.”

Her message to women contemplating a similar career path is: “Take control of your journey. Persevere and don’t give up…ever. Women are naturally nurturing, emotional and resilient, among many other traits. Use these as your strengths and differentiator to set yourself apart,” Kershni concludes.

*Ends.*

***Notes to the Editor***

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