

FAO to support 100 women in fonio production

By Doreen Andoh

THE Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has initiated a new project to support 100 women fonio producers in the country.

Fonio, a cereal, is a tasty alternative to quinoa, rice and couscous and is rich in iron, magnesium and calcium.

The FAO Country Representative, Arslan Bounemra, who announced this in Accra, said the project was being implemented in collaboration with a globally influential and award-winning chef, Fatmata Binta.

It is being funded by the FAO under a Technical Cooperation

Project, to enhance the skills of the women, boost their productivity and income levels.

The training will include hands-on sessions on fonio production, harvesting, packaging and market access.

"Project activities will commence in April 2024 to coincide with land preparations for the next growing season," Mr Bounemra said.

He said the women farmers had been organised into a group by Chef Binta and were part of a bigger 'culinary village' initiative that the chef was working on to highlight African indigenous ingredients.

Throwing more light on fonio, Mr Bounemra said it was an ancient,

nutrient-packed grain known for its resilience and ability to thrive in less fertile soils and had traditionally been cultivated by women in the country.

"However, it is undervalued despite its nutritional and environmental benefits. This project aims to change the narrative by focusing on sustainable practices, empowerment and economic development.

"The push for better production is part of the FAO's strategic framework 2022-2031, which has been organised according to the Four Betters: better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life," he said.

Mr Bounemra added that the project was a pilot that "we hope can be scaled up and replicated in other fonio-producing countries".

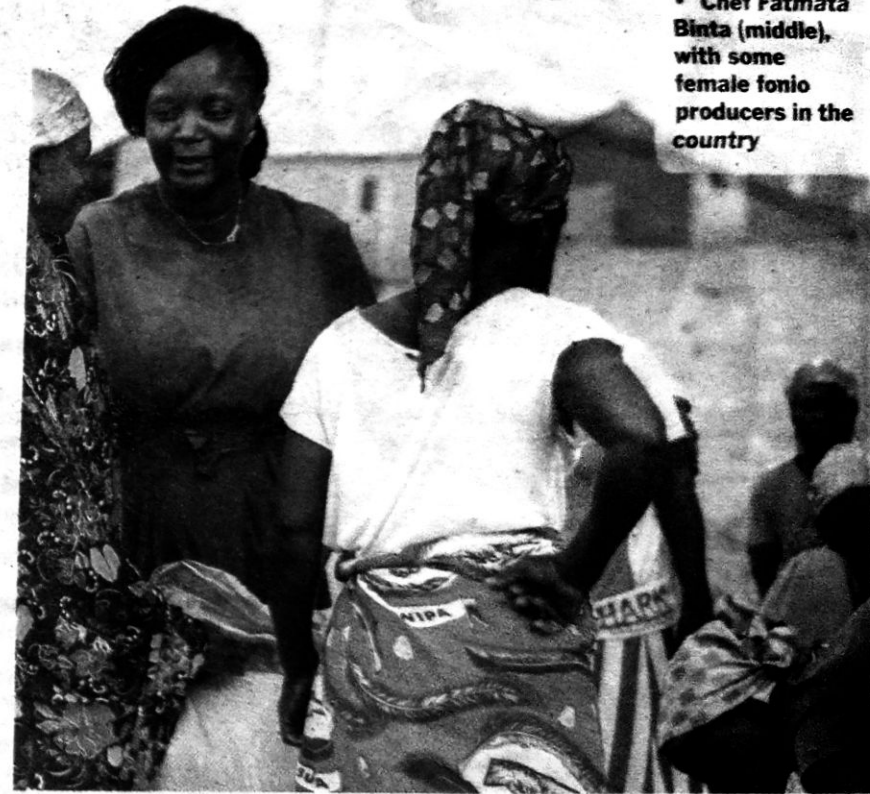
"Through this project, we are not only preserving a piece of African culinary history but also empowering women to take control of their future.

"This is a testament to what we can achieve when we work together for the common good," he said.

About Chef Binta

Chef Binta is an influential figure

• Chef Fatmata Binta (middle), with some female fonio producers in the country



in the culinary world, having won the 2022 Basque Culinary World Prize, sometimes referred to as the Nobel Prize in cooking.

Born and raised in Freetown, Sierra Leone to first-generation Sierra Leonean Fulanis of Guinea descent,

Chef Binta is now based in Ghana and travels the world advocating fonio and putting African cuisine on the global dining table.

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