

Commission on the Status of Women

Fifty-fifth session - 22 February – 4 March 2011

Panel discussion: “The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges”



**Rural poverty,
agriculture and food
security**

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Women in family agriculture



- Women work a lot and get little recognition in return
- They suffer from social invisibility as workers and as citizens
- Their work is considered as “giving a hand” while the man is considered the real “rural producer”
- Their knowledge and experience is overlooked
- Public representation of the family is granted to men.

Since 2003, the Brazilian federal government has been making efforts to change this situation. It has begun recognizing women farmers as subjects with rights and has started implementing policies to encourage their autonomy: measures to facilitate the obtaining of documents, financing, technical assistance, policies focused on the organization of women into productive groups as well as the marketing of their products.



But a patriarchal view persists among families, communities and public institutions, which consider the man as the head of the household. This view is reinforced by sexist institutional practices - legal norms and regulations - apparently neutral, but in practice, negligent in relation to gender.

The first experience: the creation of groups of women in Agrarian Reform settlements and rural communities, which work in agro-ecological production.

Difficulties:

The reaction of the husbands (disbelief, violence)

Difficulties in obtaining financing and adequate technical assistance.

Achievements:

These groups have consolidated themselves, interact with mixed groups (composed of men and women) and have created networks of producers, in an ecological and social-based economy.

Some groups are now selling their products to institutional markets such as the School Meal Program.

These women are now respected leaders in their communities.



The second experience: the Food Acquisition Program

The government buys food directly from family farmers (men and women) and from their organizations.

The food purchased is directly donated to social institutions.

This is at work all over the country and reaches around 100 thousand farmers annually.

The Program is well considered by public agents, producers and consumers.



The Food Acquisition Program and rural women

The Program allows for marketing products traditionally linked to the feminine sphere, cultivated in areas near their homes or not used for commercial cultivation.

It has absorbed more than 300 different products on a national level with many regional variations, including collected products from the forest.

The formal participation of women farmers as suppliers is still very small (less than 30% of the contracts).



In conclusion



Historic demands from rural women still need to be faced: access to resources for production, changes in the sexual division of labor and socially valuing women.

All public policies must include mechanisms that explicitly guarantee equal access among men and women to the opportunities and benefits generated from such policies.

It's necessary to recognize rural women's movements as legitimate interlocutors of the State in political spaces.

Policies for supporting women's production groups may be important tools for empowering women.