



Enabling poor rural people
to overcome poverty

Fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Statement on behalf of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD),
delivered by Xenia von Lilien, IFAD Liaison Office New York

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Mr. Chairperson,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address the Commission on the Status of Women today on behalf of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). This year's priority theme "Access and participation of women and girls to education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work" is of particular importance to IFAD.

Although many women small holder farmers have access to improved technologies for use in farming and non-farm enterprise activities, most still struggle through their days using traditional technologies, which are labour-intensive and time- and energy- consuming. Domestic chores, such as collection of water and fuelwood, divert women's time away from farming tasks and non-farm enterprise activities. Women's time poverty and lack of access to improved technologies and techniques leads to low agricultural yields and low levels of food security. For this reason, women's well being – which is one of the pillars of IFAD's Gender Plan of Action -- depends in part on labour-saving technologies.

Through its *grants* programme, IFAD has financed research on emerging issues and innovative practices related to gender equality and empowerment of women. Since its establishment in 1978, IFAD has allocated USD 695 million to reduce rural poverty by promoting innovation, science, and technology in agriculture. Over the years, the grant-financed projects have helped to improve the way agricultural research is conducted. Grant recipients, mainly national and international research centers such as the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), increasingly have taken women's roles into account in their research. This has occurred largely through the use of participatory research and gender analysis.

For instance, IFAD supported several initiatives of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), which is using participatory approaches to undertake research in biotechnology. The research programme involved women in evaluating new technologies and in the decision-making process. Women suggested new criteria, such as taste and milling qualities, during variety selection and germplasm evaluation. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, an IFAD grant to the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) introduced low-cost technologies for milk-processing. These rehabilitated the livelihoods of rural women and their families and enabled them to earn profits on surplus milk production.

Mr. Chairperson,

We are also pleased to report that IFAD's gender programme demonstrated significant progress in 2010. The *Corporate-level evaluation on IFAD's performance with regard to gender equality and women's empowerment*, requested by member states in 2008, validated IFAD's approach to gender mainstreaming. It found a positive relationship between good results on gender equality and good overall project achievement. This justifies and strengthens IFAD's continuing recognition of gender equality and women's empowerment as both instruments and goals in pursuing its mandate. The evaluation also made recommendations to improve IFAD's gender architecture, capacity-building of staff and clients, knowledge management and innovation, gender budgeting, human resources and corporate culture. We are currently working to improve these areas and will present a report on our progress to the IFAD Executive Board in December 2011.

In 2010, the ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review and the MDG Review Summit highlighted the importance of gender equality. FAO and IFAD collaborated closely to highlight the particular situation of rural women. Within IFAD, the awarding of the MDG3 Champion Torch by the Government of Denmark to IFAD President Kanayo F. Nwanze and his pledge to "do something extra" for gender equality led to significantly greater efforts within IFAD to take action to improve gender equality. The President chaired a town hall meeting last October, on the occasion of International Day of Rural Women, in which units and divisions reported on their MDG 3 Torch-inspired commitments and progress achieved.

Mr. Chairperson,

In the course of 2011, we are preparing for the consideration of the following priority theme for the 56th session of the Commission on the Status of Women: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges". IFAD welcomes this topic, which has become even more relevant in light of the current volatility of food prices. The three Rome based agencies will contribute based on their experiences and host an expert group meeting on the topic, organized by UN Women.

In closing, IFAD would like to reiterate its commitment to work with all partners – Governments, the UN system and civil society, towards the achievement of gender equality.

Thank you.