



Enabling poor rural people  
to overcome poverty

## Fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Statement on behalf of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD),  
delivered by Cheryl Morden, Director, North America Liaison Office

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Madam 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) as it is focusing on “The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges”, a priority theme that is at the core of IFAD’s mission. The focus on rural women, in our view, is long overdue. It helps to correct an earlier failure to retain this critical population area as a focus in the Beijing Platform for Action.

This attention to rural women comes at a critical moment when there is renewed interest in agriculture as a key driver of development and poverty reduction. The food price surge of 2007-08 prompted broad recognition that growth in agriculture generates the greatest improvements for the poorest people – particularly in poor, agriculture-based economies. It also focused attention on the 500 million smallholder farms, whose improved productivity is needed to achieve the estimated 70 per cent increase in global food production needed by 2050 to feed a global population projected to be over 9 billion.

Women are farmers and farmers are women. This is especially true for smallholder farmers. Promoting the economic empowerment of rural women is therefore a key strategic objective of IFAD and a leitmotif for the Rome-based agencies. Economic empowerment goes hand in hand with enabling women and men to have equal voice and influence in rural institutions and organizations, reducing women’s workloads and achieving an equal sharing of economic and social benefits between women and men.

Madam Chairperson,

IFAD is a UN specialized agency and an international financial institution, working in the most remote rural areas and with hard-to-reach people. The programmes supported by IFAD target poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and aim to create an enabling environment that empowers small holders -- women and men -- to improve their livelihoods. Female-headed households are a specific target group, as they are among the poorest of the poor.

IFAD has found that involving the whole community in activities while creating awareness about gender equality often is more effective than simply targeting women. Change does not

come about in one day, but needs time, sustained efforts, and respect for local cultures. Here are a few examples that illustrate this lesson:

- In the IFAD- supported Sustainable Livelihoods Regeneration Project (GSLRP) in Kassala State in Eastern Sudan, it took about six years until activities targeting semi-nomadic women pastoralists gained momentum. During that time, the project conducted campaigns that respected local culture, convinced male leaders to include women in group activities, found and trained female trainers who spoke local languages and were mobile enough to reach remote encampments, and found or built classrooms or community centres that could serve as training sites. Once all was in place, women gathered with enthusiasm and men supported it fully.
- In Uganda, the District Livelihoods Support Programme (DLSP) adopted a Household Mentoring approach. Adult members of a household meet together with a trained mentor from the local community and learn how to improve their food security and income and share benefits equally. This methodology generated profound impacts at the household level, not only for increased food security and incomes, but also in terms of gender empowerment and mainstreaming HIV/AIDS -- bringing about changes in gender relations "from within", rather than "from without".
- In Peru, IFAD-funded projects in Andean regions introduced the *concurso* methodology which draws from the mythological *Pacha Mama Raymi*- the celebration of Mother Earth- and involves the organization of public competitions. Communities and groups present their proposals and compete for government funding. When successful, winning groups of poor campesinos can use these resources to contract technical assistance. The women themselves define their training needs and contract the service provider, a system that has promoted the development of a market for pro-poor, pro-women technical services in the Andean region.

Madam Chairperson,

We are pleased to report that IFAD conducted a Corporate-level evaluation of IFAD's performance with regard to gender equality and women's empowerment in 2010. Building on the evaluation findings, IFAD just finalized a new gender policy that will be presented to the Executive Board in April 2012. The Gender Policy is in line with the system-wide action plan developed by the UN system that sets standards for gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment. For IFAD, promoting the economic empowerment of rural women is a key strategic objective and all other improvement of rural women's status – increased voice, access to assets and services, reduced drudgery – are directly linked to it.

Madam Chairperson,

This year's debate has provided an important opportunity to bring new partners to the United Nations, such as the academic community working on agricultural research, as well as the private sector -- including farmers' and producer organizations. We would like to encourage further collaboration with these partners and strengthened partnership between the Rome

based agencies and UN-Women on rural women's economic empowerment, in particular on the following set of priorities for the future:

- Scaling up investments in rural development, finance and agriculture to improve rural livelihoods, increasing food security by consistently paying attention to gender differences and the gender roles of men and women;
- Expanding rural women's access and ownership of productive resources, finance and land, and creating off-farm employment that complements farming income and enables young people to set up their future in rural areas, and;
- Mainstreaming the economic empowerment of rural women in Rio+20 and ensuring attention to this critical but overlooked population within a post-2015 development framework.

In closing, IFAD reiterates its commitment to work with all partners – Governments, the UN system, the private sector, and civil society, to achieve gender equality and economic empowerment of rural women, both on and off the farm.

Thank you.

