



**INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION
OFFICE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS**

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**Statement by International Labour Office
Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-sixth session**

Chairperson,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The priority theme for the 56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) - empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges- provides an ideal opportunity to highlight the importance of decent work and full employment for rural women's empowerment. In many regions the female share in total employment in agriculture is over 30% with the female share in employment in parts of Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa over 40%. In South Asia 70% of women workers were engaged in agriculture. This is the sector that contains the highest proportion of precarious jobs, characterized by informal arrangements, low levels of remuneration, and little or no social and health protection. Rural women in developing countries are heavily burdened by their double roles as paid or unpaid workers and family care providers. The latter restricts their time and mobility to engage in productive work.

The **Decent Work Agenda** covering employment creation/enterprise development, social protection, standards and rights at work, and social dialogue gives the overall policy framework for an integrated approach to pursue the objectives of equitable and productive employment for women in agriculture and in rural areas. More specifically, its relevance is seen through: (1) generating better jobs for both women and men through sustainable rural growth; (2) extending the coverage of social protection to all categories of rural workers; (3) closing the gap in labour standards for rural workers, by paying particular attention to awareness of rights among governments, employers' and workers' organizations as well as individual women and men workers, and by eliminating gender bias in enforcement of these rights; and (4) fostering social dialogue by promoting institutions that equally represent rural women's and men's interests.

Governments can play an important role in supporting women in rural situations and in particular agricultural workers by ratifying international conventions relevant to female agricultural workers and implementing **international labour standards** that are key to gender equality: Conventions Nos. 100 on Equal remuneration (1951), ratified by 168 countries and 111 on Discrimination in employment and occupation (1958), ratified by 169 countries; as well as others related to child labour, safety and health, labour inspection, social security, minimum wage and organizing rights of rural workers' organizations. For example, ILO's Rural Workers' Organisations Recommendation, 1975 (No.149), offers guidance on how to organise rural workers, recognising the gender-based challenges. It encourages the competent authorities to promote programmes highlighting the role which women can and should play in the rural community, and to integrate them into general programmes of education and training to which women and men should have equal access. It promotes workers' education and adult education services, specially adapted to the social, economic and cultural needs of various categories of rural workers, including women. Another example that finds resonance in 2012 as the **International Year of Cooperatives** is the

ILO Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation, 2002 (No. 193). ILO research demonstrates that the promotion of cooperatives brings strength for the excluded and vulnerable. Cooperative enterprises have proven to be strong forces for social change and for economic advancement. The text enshrines principles of social solidarity, democracy, equality and equity underpinned by the self-help approach, and provides a solid foundation for promoting gender equality.

In giving **policy advice** to the tripartite constituents on ways to empower rural women, the ILO makes the case for governments providing for a **social protection floor**. This floor would guarantee basic income in the form of social transfers in cash or kind, such as pensions, child benefits, employment guarantees and services for the unemployed and working poor, while providing universal access to affordable social services in health, water and sanitation, education, food, housing, and other services defined according to national priorities. As noted in the report by the Advisory Group on the Social Protection Floor for a fair and inclusive globalization, chaired by Ms Bachelet, a number of countries make specific provisions to provide social protection for workers in rural areas. Brazil's social protection floor comprises, amongst other programmes, the rural pension scheme; China increased basic health coverage including 800 million people in a basic health rural cooperative medical scheme and has launched a pilot rural pension scheme; India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme provides 100 days of employment per rural household per year and has a positive empowering effect on rural women.

To support this policy advice, ILO has developed a number of **tools**. A new manual has been published to improve the freedom of association rights of women workers in rural areas; aimed at trainers from trade unions or other civil society partners it gives practical "how to" guidance on engaging with and informing rural women about their rights so that they can participate in collective bargaining and social dialogue. The ILO's Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE) Programme is a proven platform that assists those working in largely informal economies to build the skills and abilities needed to generate additional income. Tested in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Madagascar, Burkina Faso and Niger, TREE builds on ILO's long-standing experience in promoting Community-Based Training worldwide. The Work Improvement in Neighbourhood Development (WIND) programme is a participatory and action-oriented training course designed to address the special circumstances faced by agricultural families. It especially provides practical responses to the problems of agricultural safety and health. Building on the ILO's experience gained through the WISE (Work Improvement in Small Enterprises) programme, WIND applies a participatory and action-oriented training approach, designed for rapid and sustainable improvements in farmers' safety, health and working conditions. A final tool worth mentioning which specifically addresses the safety and health of agricultural workers is ILO's Code of Practice on Safety and Health in Agriculture. Agriculture is one of the most hazardous occupations worldwide, in several countries the fatal accident rate in agriculture is double the average for all other industries. ILO estimates that workers suffer 250 million accidents every year and out of a total of 335,000 fatal workplace accidents worldwide, there are some 170,000 deaths among agricultural workers. The code of practice raises awareness of the hazards and risks associated with agriculture and promotes their effective management and control.

Chair, ladies and gentlemen, there is no single policy response to the challenge of addressing rural employment for poverty reduction and decent work deficits. However the ILO stands ready to assist its constituents, and to cooperate fully with FAO, IFAD, WFP, UN Women and the whole UN family to work with governments so that women in agriculture and in rural areas can achieve equitable and productive employment and decent work.

Thank you.