

**JOINT STATEMENT BY THE ROME-BASED AGENCIES (FAO, IFAD, and WFP)  
ON CSW 56 PRIORITY THEME:  
Empowering Rural Women to Reduce  
Poverty and Eradicate Hunger**

**Presented by: Ms Ann Tutwiler, Deputy Director-General, FAO  
on behalf of the Rome-based agencies  
27 February 2012, opening meeting**

**Introduction (First-- Who Are We?)**

Distinguished chair and delegates, I would like to thank the Commission on the Status of Women for inviting FAO to speak here on behalf of the Rome based agencies.

The Rome based agencies are the three UN organizations most directly responsible for achieving a world without hunger. We each tackle the challenge of hunger from different angles – FAO through knowledge generation and policy; IFAD through rural investment programmes; and WFP is the world’s largest humanitarian agency, providing food and nutrition assistance and innovative solutions for fighting hunger worldwide.

Together we have been working to ensure rural women are central agents in the fight against hunger.

**What we believe**

We in the development community are always being asked to set concrete goals and identify concrete objectives for our work. Last year’s State of Food and Agriculture Report could not have set clearer goals and objectives for us.

The SOFA showed that by giving women equal access to productive agricultural resources—land, inputs, training, credit-- women’s farm productivity would increase by 20-30%, countries’ total agricultural output would increase by 2.5-4.0% and 100-150 million fewer people would be hungry.

Essentially the SOFA said because rural women’s economic potential is squandered, 100 to 150 million people are still hungry or about 1 in 10 and a significant share of agricultural production is “missing”.

The Rome-based food and agriculture agencies believe that we can make a significant contribution to eradicating hunger and poverty in our lifetime, by working together to realize rural women’s full economic potential. We know what to do. It’s time to do it. We ask you to join us.

**Why we believe it**

Feeding a global population of just over 9 billion in 2050 will require a 60 per cent increase in global food production. Three-fourths of that production will need to come from developing countries. But, producing more food is not enough.

FAO's projections say we could produce 60 percent more food, but unless poor people have the means to acquire affordable food we still could be faced with 320 million people chronically undernourished by 2050.

We know that most of the world's poor people live in rural areas and that most of world's poor people are small-holder farmers. We know that 92% of the hunger in the world is not due to emergencies—it is due to poverty. We know that in developing countries growth in the agricultural sector is six times more effective at reducing poverty than growth in the industrial sector. This means to solve the poverty problem, and to solve the hunger problem, the agriculture sector in developing countries— particularly smallholder agriculture and small and medium agricultural enterprises—must not only produce more food, it must also generate rural employment.

Neither of these goals can be achieved without women. Women are vital to both. Women play an important role in both food production and small and medium enterprises. Women make up 43 percent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries. Women are crucial decision-makers and managers all along the agricultural value chain. Rural women are active economic agents who could unleash major advancements in hunger eradication and development, if they were able to participate equally in the agricultural economy.

Last year's State of Food and Agriculture Report made it abundantly clear that women have less access to productive resources and opportunities, than men. This "gender gap" in assets, inputs and services imposes costs on women themselves, but also to the agriculture sector, the broader economy and society.

The gender gap in agricultural production and productivity is not because women aren't capable of being good farmers. It arises because of social constraints on rural women. Female farmers produce less than male farmers because they do not have access to seeds and fertilizer and credit, not because women are poor farmers.

Women agricultural labourers earn less than men and their jobs are more often part time, because of discrimination against women. In addition to earning less from formal employment, women spend a lot of time in un-remunerative work. For example, African women spend 40 billion hours a year just collecting water.

Rural women and female headed households are disproportionately affected by crises, poverty and unequal access to many social services such as water and sanitation, maternal health, secondary and higher education.

Women are also responsible for household food selection, preparation and food security. But, because rural women's have access to fewer economic resources, their children are twice as likely to be underweight and rural girls more likely to be out of school than their urban counterparts.

Malnourished rural girls become malnourished rural mothers, whose children are 40 percent more likely to die before their fifth birthday than children born in a city. If the cycle is not broken, it will continue to undermine children's mental and physical development, productivity, and health.

### **What's being done?**

The work of our three agencies is heavily focused on rural people. Our joint activities on gender equality and women's empowerment range from policy research and analysis, operational support capacity development, and advocacy. Recent collective efforts by our agencies have filled critical knowledge gaps: we have established a gender and land rights database; we have produced (along with the International Labour Organization) a series of policy briefs on gender and rural employment and a comprehensive Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook, produced jointly with the World Bank.

In addition, the three agencies lead the Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women, which has measured the progress of rural women against the MDGs. The findings are not good: globally, rural women fare worse than rural men and urban men and women against all the MDG indicators, not just hunger and malnutrition, with precious few exceptions. A full report by 25 United Nations Organizations led by RBA's offers full evidence across all MDGs. It will be launched at the CSW this week.

The three Rome-based agencies have initiated a partnership with UN Women to advance the economic empowerment of rural women in Africa, Latin America and Asia.

### **What needs to be done?**

The pervasive, entrenched disparities between men and women in rural areas will require efforts on multiple fronts. We propose action in six areas:

- Policy: **policies, programmes/operations and institutions often have different impacts on men and women.** Governments, donors and development practitioners working in agriculture and rural development, fisheries, forestry and livestock must understand these different impacts and design policies and programmes to ensure that women and men benefit equally. To make better decisions and to design better policies and programs, data disaggregated by sex, age and rural and urban location is needed. The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index, which is being launched at this meeting will help meet this need.
- Legal: **Women need full economic rights** to be able to own, buy, sell or inherit land, to open a bank account or borrow money, to sign a contract, set up a business, or sell produce. Government officials at all levels and the private sector must develop better capacities to provide services out to rural women and be held accountable to make sure rural women have full economic rights.
- Knowledge: **Women and girls must have the same access to education, training, and information and extension services as men.** Building their human capital is arguably one of the best investments to achieve gender equality in rural areas. FAO's Farmer Field Schools and Junior Farmer Field Schools, for example, have empowered millions

of women and girls (as well as men and boys) in the world through ownership of the process of knowledge.

- Technology: These rural women need access to essential public services, infrastructure and **improved technologies to free up their time and enhance their productivity**. Simple investments in water pumps can save women billions of hours. With more time available, women can engage in better remunerated and rewarding activities.
- Leadership: rural women need support to develop their voice and capacity to **participate actively and meaningfully in decision making processes** that affect their individual and collective lives and livelihoods, starting with farmers' and producers' organizations.
- Social: We need to make investments in well-targeted safety nets for the most vulnerable rural women and girls that promote access to health care; education and school feeding **Scaling up investments in the nutrition of rural women and girls will break the inter-generational cycle of malnourishment, and is central to their economic empowerment**. Investing in the nutrition of rural women and their young children, especially in the critical first 1,000 days of life, contributes to improving their quality of life, enhances their participation in economically productive spheres and has long-lasting positive effects on survival and healthy development of their children.

UN Women and our three agencies convened a group of rural development specialists last October in Accra. These experts agreed with these ideas and proposed that the UN system comply with gender equality and diversity commitments within its own organizations in order to serve as role models for Governments and other organizations and to legitimize policy guidance on gender equality issues in their operations.

### **What FAO has committed to do?**

We in Rome are committed to meeting this challenge. At FAO, we are working to be at the forefront of rural women's empowerment in our own work. Our targets, enshrined in our soon-to-be-approved Gender Equality Policy, include:

- All major FAO statistical databases incorporate sex-disaggregated data, where relevant and available, by 2015.
- All managers and professional staff are required to meet minimum gender analytical competencies by 2015.
- 30% of FAO's operational work and budget at the country and regional levels is allocated to women-specific targeted interventions by 2017.

In addition, we are working with our colleagues on the UN System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. As Deputy Director General, I am committed to supporting this initiative and ensuring that gender becomes the responsibility of everyone in FAO, and not just the work of one small division. In our new strategic plan, I am committed to ensuring that we have gender-disaggregated targets in each of our goals and objectives.

## **What Should We Do?**

First, we should commit ourselves to the goal of giving rural women and men equal access to the productive resources they need to fulfil their role as farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs. Second, we should develop clear targets and indicators which measure our progress toward this goal.

We know that by unleashing the abilities of rural women, agricultural productivity will increase; nations' agricultural output will be raised, and rural off farm activities will flourish. Thus millions of people will be lifted out of hunger. But no single agency or the UN system working alone can solve these complex problems. We must all work together in partnership.

The three Rome-based agencies are working together. We invite you to join us. Let's join forces to empower rural women, so we can find increase women's productivity, find the "missing agricultural production" and lift 100 – 150 million additional people out of poverty.