

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF RURAL WOMEN

REMARKS BY CHERYL MORDEN, DIRECTOR
NORTH AMERICAN LIAISON OFFICE
INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR AGRICULTURAL
DEVELOPMENT

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Distinguished delegates,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The recognition paid to rural women on this special day of commemoration is long overdue. Many of the challenges that the world faces today cannot be met without the empowerment of rural women.

Rural women are poorer than men and they have fewer pathways out of poverty. They work longer hours, often own no land or property and have little or no access to credit. They rely on their own muscle and labour, having access only to rudimentary tools and no transport. All of this means women are more vulnerable to illness, economic shocks, natural disasters, and the effects of environmental degradation and climate change.

And yet... the world depends on rural women. They feed the world, they care for families and for the

earth. Women account for more than half of the labour required to produce the food eaten in developing countries. And in Africa, women provide some three-fourths of the labour for food production.

So, it's past time that the world took note of rural women and their lives.

The world has become critically aware this year of the challenge of growing and marketing more food, fuel, and fiber. To keep pace with growing demand, food production will need to double by 2050.

At the same time, the effects of climate change – such as increased exposure to drought, rising temperatures, more erratic rainfall and extreme weather events – mean that by 2020 almost 50 million additional people may be a greater risk of hunger.

Rural women are critical to our ability to successfully meet these challenges and avert growing hunger and poverty. How will we ensure that they are enabled to contribute to solving these challenges?

I would like to highlight four areas in which IFAD is focusing its efforts and then talk about a new resource that we think will help all of us better meet these challenges.

First, we are working to assist women to realize their agricultural productivity potential, as part of overall efforts to expand food

production. Women's untapped potential for improved productivity is too often overlooked in the discussion of priority actions needed to increase the global food supply. However, the evidence shows that when women have access to more of the resources that men have, their productivity increases and their income grows.

In the Gambia, for example, negotiations at the community level led to an agreement that allows landless women rice growers seasonal use of lands whose owners lack the labour to farm them. In exchange, the women contribute labour to the reclamation of degraded land. As a result, with the availability of reclaimed communal land, women have become permanent landowners, rice production and incomes have increased, and household food security has improved.

We are also strengthening women's capacity to manage natural resources and natural disasters. Women are often more adversely affected than men by the environmental degradation and disasters resulting from rapidly growing demand for food, fuel, water, and fiber. They rely heavily on natural resources to provide the food, water, and fuel for their households. Going forward, efforts to adapt to and mitigate climate change, preserve biodiversity, reverse desertification, and prepare for and respond to natural disaster need to recognize, understand and strengthen women's roles.

In Nepal, small groups of poor men and women have been given long-term leases on degraded forest lands. The groups work to regenerate the forests, while supporting livelihood activities based on forest resources. Halfway through the project, it was clear that women did much of the work, but had received little training and had little say in decisions. A more concerted effort to boost women's participation led to a significant change in gender attitudes and behaviour among men and women. Women now share decision making and take the lead in forestry planning. In some cases, men are sharing household work and childcare so women can participate more fully in productive and community activities. The regenerated forests provide readily accessible fodder for animals, resulting in significant time savings for women.

Third, we are strengthening women's access to markets, and financial services, and promoting their equitable participation in value chains.

Though markets for agricultural goods are expanding dramatically, women's access is limited by gender norms and barriers to information, education, resources, and finance. They most readily engage in low-value transactions for which the barriers to entry are low, such as petty trading, beer brewing, and dressmaking. Programme interventions that build on targeted analysis of gender roles in production, processing, and marketing are needed to improve women's access to higher-value markets and to securing a greater share of revenue in value chains.

In Rwanda we are working with rural women entrepreneurs to strengthen business associations, raise productivity and quality standards, provide access to financial services, business development services, and markets. This has led to cases like that of Vicentie Bizarete, a rural entrepreneur who was producing banana and sorghum beer. With assistance from the IFAD-supported project, Vicentie enrolled in a training course, participated in study trips and developed a business plan. She learned to make banana wine and passion fruit juice, as well as papaya and strawberry jam. Her products have labels that she designed and had printed. She is the only banana wine producer in her district and has thus captured the entire market and is now exporting to three other districts.

Finally, we are promoting rural women's leadership and fostering processes that strengthen women's voice. For more effective and sustainable agricultural and rural development, women's perspectives and interests need to be reflected in policies, programmes, and resource allocations.

IFAD is working, for example, to improve women's participation and leadership in water management, where -- despite recognition of the women's central role -- there has been very inadequate integration of gender perspectives in water management initiatives. As a result, women are often excluded from decision making on agricultural water management, and their needs are therefore

overlooked. We are promoting the integration of gender perspectives and analysis into project design, based on solid social and economic analysis of the local setting. Some of the techniques that are being tried include establishing a minimum quota of women's membership in Water User Associations, instituting lower membership fees for women, and extending WUA membership to users of water for purposes other than irrigation. When women have a say in water management, they are likely to urge systems that address the multiple uses of water – for both productive and domestic purposes.

How to meet these challenges on the ground?

There is a growing awareness of the critical roles that women play in agriculture and rural development, but this often does not translate into on-the-ground practices.

What we need is specific, concrete information and knowledge. We need to know what works and why and – just as important – what doesn't work and why...and how to make sure that agricultural and rural development activities don't actually worsen women's situation.

To help us do better, IFAD, FAO, and the World Bank have just issued the GENDER IN AGRICULTURE SOURCEBOOK.

The Sourcebook is a treasure trove of analysis, good practices, and lessons learned regarding gender in agriculture. It focuses on a wide range of sub-

sectors, including water, land, markets, natural resource management, infrastructure and governance, providing useful guidance to practitioners, by highlighting promising innovations and cautionary insights about the cost of neglecting gender in operational design and implementation. It also provides a road map for policy makers.

It is meant to be a living document – available in hard copy and online. It will serve as a platform for training, technical assistance, and continued collaboration among our three organizations, and for broadening that collaboration to include – for example -- many of the organizations here today. There are folders in the back of the room with information about the Sourcebook, or you can access it online at www.worldbank.org/genderinag.

In conclusion, the Secretary General's message on this first International Day of Rural Women is especially fitting and welcome. He said, "I urge all countries to seize the opportunity we will have next month at the Conference on Financing for Development in Doha to put the needs of rural women at the top of the global agenda. By making women active partners in addressing the world's pressing food crisis, we can do much more than solve the immediate problem; we can pave the way for a more secure global future. On this Day, let us commit to that mission."

IFAD joins its voice with that of the Secretary General in urging the world to make rural women

key partners in solving the food crisis and building a more secure global future.