

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



Fifty-second Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women

Statement delivered by

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Mr. Chairperson,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address the Commission on the Status of Women on behalf of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) as the Commission takes up the important topic of “Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women.”

As a UN agency and an international financial institution, IFAD finances gender equality and the empowerment of women through loans and grants for activities that incorporate gender analysis and target poor women. It also increases financing for gender equality through ongoing efforts to ensure the mainstreaming of gender perspectives throughout its operations.

There are few sectors with greater potential to contribute to the economic empowerment of rural women than agriculture. In most developing countries, smallholder farming largely has a woman’s face. In Africa, women provide an estimated three-fourths of the labour for food production. In Asia, women work as hired agricultural labourers or unpaid family workers, contributing between ten and fifty percent of the labour needed for growing various crops. In Latin America, women play a key role in family farming.

Yet too often, women farmers – along with their knowledge and expertise in growing, harvesting, and processing food – are overlooked by government strategies and programs, and bypassed by extension, research, and technology. Rural women are responsible for half of the world’s food production and produce between sixty and eighty percent of the food in most developing countries. However, only fifteen percent of agricultural extension workers are women. When women are thus overlooked, their well-being and that of their families and communities suffers. Their productive potential is untapped and heavy workloads leave less time and energy for care giving. One point is clear, substantial progress in achieving MDG 1 worldwide requires a concerted, focused investment in women farmers.

IFAD is the third largest multilateral source of development assistance for agriculture in developing countries. Our investment activities to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment are built on three pillars:

- Economic empowerment through increased access to and control over fundamental assets;
- Strengthening women’s role in decision-making in community affairs and local institutions; and
- Improving women’s well-being and easing their workload.

Through its *lending* programme, IFAD supports a wide range of rural development activities, including the provision of agricultural services, promotion of small and medium size enterprises and support to rural finance. IFAD’s efforts are aimed at empowering women in rural communities by increasing incomes, improving livelihoods, and strengthening women’s organizations. For example, the IFAD-funded Colombia Rural Microenterprise Development Project (PADEMÉR) supported the development of rural micro-enterprises as a means to increase the incomes of the rural poor landless population, with particular emphasis on households headed by women. As a result of the project, access to markets increased, which also provided a positive impact on neighboring families.

Through its *grants* programme, IFAD has financed research on emerging issues and innovative practices related to gender equality and empowerment of women. For instance, through a joint project with the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), IFAD supported research on labour saving

technologies for women in rice production, and financed a study on remittances of Filipino migrants in Italy, a project implemented by INSTRAW.

In the projects IFAD supports, the greatest impact has been achieved when improved access to productive assets has been complemented by well-focused training tailored to women's needs and their roles in agricultural production. Providing appropriate extension services and marketing information, and strengthening group formation are likewise effective means for enhancing women's social and economic situation. With regard to empowerment, IFAD has found that women's groups and organizations have proven very effective in giving women collective power and influence. It has also found that increased productivity and the capacity of local communities to organize and take advantage of new income-earning opportunities are conditioned by access to basic services. This includes access to rural roads, potable water, sanitation, schools, literacy classes, and community centres. These services enable women to have the time, energy, and skills to participate in the mainstreaming of economic development, community affairs, and public decision-making.

In addition, IFAD has identified the need for clear indicators to measure the impact of project and program interventions on pro-poor land tenure security, with special reference to the impact on women, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups.

Mr. Chairperson,

Five years after the adoption of the Monterrey consensus, member states will gather in Doha, Qatar towards the end of the year for a "Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus." We would like to urge member states to systematically apply a gender perspective throughout the conference and its outcome, as well as the preparations leading up to it. In particular, there is a need to better understand how gender perspectives are being addressed in new aid modalities and how to ensure that gender concerns are not overlooked or downplayed. These new aid modalities, which are emerging from the global focus on harmonization, represent a shift away from development projects to a broader focus on national institutions through, for example, sector-wide approaches and budget support. Specific efforts will be required to ensure that gender analysis is integrated into poverty reduction and sectoral development strategies, including agriculture and rural development.

Later this year, another functional commission of ECOSOC - the Commission on Sustainable Development - will take up the topics of "Agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification, and Africa." In relation to these issues, women play a critical role as farmers, agricultural labourers, or proprietors of small scale businesses. Women often bear the brunt of environmental degradation spending longer and longer hours collecting firewood and water. Women's contribution to sustainable development, as well as the growing challenges they face, needs to be an integral part of any consideration of the CSD themes. Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women is most relevant in this context.

Mr. Chairperson,

Decisions about resource investment are increasingly critical as the MDG target date of 2015 approaches. We welcome recent evidence of the global community's reawakening to the need to focus attention and resources on agricultural development. We urge decisive action to shift investment - while maintaining a gender perspective -- toward rural areas and the people whose livelihoods depend on agriculture. We look forward to working with others toward this end.

Thank you.

