



Enabling poor rural people
to overcome poverty

66th Session General Assembly – Third Committee

Agenda Item 28: Advancement of Women

Statement on behalf of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), delivered
by Xenia von Lilien, IFAD Liaison Office New York

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Mr. Chairman,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address the Third Committee today on behalf of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) as the Committee takes up agenda item 28 on the advancement of women. As this is my first opportunity to address this Committee, please allow me to begin by offering you, Mr. Chairman, my congratulations on your election and my best wishes on guiding this Committee and its important work.

The linkage between gender equality and economic and social development is critical to IFAD's work to increase food security, nutrition and the incomes of poor rural women and men in developing countries. Overall, women comprise 43 percent of the agricultural workforce in rural areas of developing countries, while accounting for some 50 percent in sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Asia. Rural women are the hands that work on small farms for very little or no pay. They are the caregivers who look after young children, the elderly, and the sick. They are the small business entrepreneurs that keep the rural economy alive and they are the investors who dedicate significant portions of their earnings to the wellbeing of their families and societies.

Despite their indispensable roles, however, women continue to face multiple impediments and many of their efforts remain largely invisible and unrecognized. Rural women face steeper challenges to achieving equality with men than those met by their urban counterparts. Time and labour allocations in the agriculture sector are highly segmented by gender roles and norms, with

women often relegated to activities that are less productive, less remunerative, and more time consuming. Traditional gender roles are more deeply entrenched in rural areas and women face limits on their mobility and their access to education and other essential services.

Gender inequalities take a heavy toll on the economic and welfare prospects not only of rural women and girls, but also of their households and societies. The unequal access of women and men farmers to productive inputs results in an estimated average gap yield of 25 percent.

According to FAO's *State of World Food and Agriculture, 2010-11* (SOFA), this "gender gap" is one of the reasons for the underperformance of the agriculture sector in many developing countries.

Mr. Chairman,

IFAD's experience confirms that when the constraints faced by women farmers are overcome, agricultural productivity increases and other development indicators improve. Success depends on recognizing differences among women and men while also recognizing that women's and men's roles change over time. It is thus important to build on complementarities between women and men in agricultural production and the rural economy, and to engage men and community leaders in promoting gender equality. Participatory approaches that ensure women's active and meaningful engagement are needed to harness the knowledge, resources, and support of diverse segments of the community. Measures for positive discrimination, such as quotas, and the identification of and support for local innovators and leaders also contribute to positive results. Finally, we believe that it is important to model gender equality in IFAD's corporate practices and in the field, and we are currently developing a new gender policy that will help to ensure that we live up to our commitments in this regard.

A great many strides forward have been taken in the journey toward gender equality and the empowerment of rural women – however more needs to be done to unlock the full potential of women in reducing global hunger and poverty.

In IFAD's experience, the following are among the priority actions needed to accelerate progress toward gender equality and empowerment of rural women:

- **Tackle gender inequalities in agricultural value chains and promote wealth creation among poor rural women** by reducing obstacles to women's entry into higher value markets, building on women's success in traditional value chains, and reducing women's work burden through access to social services, infrastructure, and labour- and time-saving technologies.
- **Invest in strengthening the capacity of women and girls to farm more sustainably and productively in changing environmental and climatic circumstances.** Women face different risks from men in relation to climate change and other shocks. At the same time, they hold important knowledge about natural resource systems that can be a source for strengthening overall resilience of rural households and communities.
- **Support rural women's leadership and voice in decision-making processes.** Rural women often remain marginalized in decision making within households and producers' organizations. The channelling of resources directly to women within producers' organizations for capacity building and other activities can help to ensure that they gain an active role in decisions that affect their lives and their communities.
- **Strengthen the development and use of relevant indicators and the collection of sex disaggregated statistical data** to improve visibility and understanding of the work of women farmers and rural entrepreneurs.

Looking towards the 56th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and the 2015 target date of the MDGs, renewed concern for gender equality and women's empowerment needs to give greater attention to the role of rural women in development. Tapping into the productivity of rural women can be a key factor in formulating development approaches that are fit for the challenges of the 21st century.

Thank you.

