

Co-Chairs' Key Messages

from the Joint Biennial Workshop of the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) and the OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET)

“Food Security and Land Rights: Empowering Rural Women”

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Rural women fare worse than rural men and urban men and women against all the MDGs indicators, with very few exceptions. This include in areas as diverse as agriculture, nutrition, health, education, paid and unpaid employment and social protection. All actors need to step up efforts to support rural women’s empowerment, rights, participation and access to services. Closing the gender gap in terms of access to resources and support for women in the agriculture sector also makes good economic sense. For example, it has been estimated that if women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20 to 30 per cent. This would raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5 to 4 per cent; and reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12 to 17 per cent.¹

Against this background, and drawing on evidence from case studies presented in the workshop, **participants called for bilateral and multilateral agencies, and other development partners to:**

1. Recognise rural women as leaders and agents of change.

Rural women are agents of change at different levels in society, including in the household. Since rural women form the backbone of smallholder agriculture and are the main producers and processors of food in many developing countries, their voices must be heard. Civil society and decision-making processes at the local level can be important levers and women must be healthy and educated to participate effectively. Women working together in networks and associations both improve outcomes for women and deliver broader social and economic benefits for all.

Women are strong and resilient and should not be seen as vulnerable but rather as being in vulnerable situations. Gender power dynamics create vulnerability at the household level, for example in terms of women’s decision-making about their sexual and reproductive health, caring for girl children, and nutrition and food security. Analysis and strategies to address underlying – often invisible – problems are critical to ensuring that women are healthy and able to claim and exercise their rights and further act as agents of change. It is important that development partners understand the full scope of rural women’s lack of security, taking into account that women are not a homogenous group but subject to different kinds of vulnerabilities which vary over the course of their lives.

It is essential to work with men and boys to achieve gender equality, and ensure that they understand that the benefits of gender equality and women’s empowerment and leadership are favourable also to them.

2. Strengthen rural women’s rights to the access, use and control of property, including land.

Robust land laws are not sufficient – the gap between laws and practice has to be closed to improve women’s equal rights to inherit, access, use and control land. Development partners need to improve their understanding of gender relations in the context of land-related investments and how multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination can negatively impact rural women’s rights with respect to land. It is also important to recognise and address the specific land-related challenges in conflict and post-conflict situations, including gender-based violence.

¹ FAO, 2010-11: The State of Food and Agriculture—Women in Agriculture. Closing the Gender Gap for Development.

Development partners need to facilitate rural women's access to markets/value chain development. This is key to women's ability to access broader and more profitable forms of trade and business opportunities and realise their potential.

3. Ensure better results and impacts for rural women by building the evidence-base of what works.

It is important to gather information about "what works" for rural women and use it as a basis for policy making and dialogue. For example, a better understanding of the full scope of rural women's labour and time poverty, and of relations within the household, would help donors improve their programmes. At the same time, the collection of data and information is resource intensive. Development partners therefore need to make better use of what we already know by improving knowledge management, and identify what new information is genuinely needed before engaging in the collection of additional data.

In this process, both short and long-term development results for women should be recognised. Results which are challenging to measure, such as empowerment and confidence-building, must also be considered.

4. Improve their practices and behaviours to support rural women by using the aid effectiveness principles.

Development partners have endorsed the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* (2005) and linked agreements, committing to ensure accountability, strengthen co-ordination, and support country ownership and capacity development – including of national statistical offices. It is time to apply these principles to support for rural women's empowerment.

Development partners can also increase their efforts to scale up and replicate innovative practices that work. This includes integrating gender equality dimensions into large scale investments such as national plans for agriculture and other sectors, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), and into Scaling-Up Nutrition (SUN) frameworks.

5. Use traditional practices and indigenous knowledge to support rural women.

Local knowledge, traditions and community based approaches can be harnessed to improve support for rural women. For example, building on women's traditional savings schemes is an effective strategy to strengthen development partners' programmes. Women know what to do but must be supported.

6. Ensure that the negative impacts of climate change on rural women are mitigated and that the benefits of green growth flow to women.

Women often have the solutions to sustainable development challenges, and are the champions of sustainable agriculture and green growth. There are clear linkages between gender equality, women's empowerment and the effects of climate change. It is important that development partners analyse and recognise these when designing and implementing their programmes.

7. Invest in and for rural women.

Development partners can further scale up their support for rural women's empowerment.² It is essential to track and monitor this funding, and ensure that it is appropriately targeted.

It is time to act. We know what to do and need to do it now.

² In 2009-2010, 31 per cent of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) by members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in the sectors of rural development and agriculture was focused on gender equality and women's empowerment.