

ECOSOC HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

JOINT STATEMENT FAO, IFAD and WFP

Mister President,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address the ECOSOC High-level Segment today on behalf of the UN food and agriculture Rome-based Agencies- FAO, IFAD and WFP- on the topic “ *Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regards to gender equality and the empowerment of women*”.

In 2009, the world reached a grim new record of over 1 billion chronically hungry people. Most of the world’s poor and hungry people live in rural areas, and women are among the most affected.

At the same time that they constitute more than half of the world’s chronically hungry, women produce half of the world’s food and make up the majority of the agricultural workforce in some regions. Agriculture provides employment for more than 80 % of women in sub-Saharan Africa and close to 70 % in East Asia and the Pacific (excluding China). Yet, for many years the design of development policies and projects assumed- incorrectly! – that farmers and rural workers are mainly men.

Women also play active roles as food producers for their families, as well as traders, processors, labourers and entrepreneurs but face considerable constraints and vulnerabilities compared to men. This is as a result of the persisting socio-cultural and political inequalities in households and societies. Women are routinely discriminated against and are denied equal access to key productive assets and services such as land, water, credit and technology.

This situation is no longer tolerable, particularly given the current context of new challenges, including climate change and the global financial crisis, combined with the longstanding underinvestment in food security, agriculture and rural development - all of which tend to exacerbate food insecurity and increase the number of rural women living in extreme poverty.

Food security not only requires an adequate supply of food- of which there is enough in the world for everyone- but it also requires availability, access and utilization by *all* people irrespective of sex, age, ethnicity, religion and socioeconomic conditions.

As a result of the 2007-08 global food crisis, the international community increasingly recognizes that hunger and poverty are heavily concentrated in rural areas and that substantial progress towards achieving the MDGs and other international development goals thus depends significantly on improving food security and agricultural and rural development. Over the past two years, major international and regional meetings have resulted in renewed commitments to increase support to the agricultural sector, food security and nutrition. Those pledges and promises have yet to be translated into the breakthrough action needed to achieve and sustain results to improve the lives of rural women and their families.

Ultimately, much more attention needs to be paid to rural women who produce a large share of the food consumed around the world, but who are also amongst the poorest of the poor. We cannot achieve food security and eradicate poverty by neglecting more than half of the world's population.

A common agenda (FAO, IFAD and WFP)

FAO, IFAD and WFP have joint expertise and complementary capacity in fostering food security, agricultural and rural development, reducing hunger and enabling the world's poor and hungry people to improve their lives. Furthermore, the three Rome-based agencies have long recognized that poverty and hunger will not be defeated until women enjoy the same rights and opportunities as men. Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women is therefore a vital component of our work and we are committed to scaling up our collaborative efforts to ensure that our programmes reach more and more women farmers and producers. Through financial, technical and humanitarian assistance, the Rome-based agencies thus focus on:

- Enhancing women's access to income-earning opportunities and productive assets by removing the constraints rural women face in agriculture and by improving women's access to productive resources, credit, technology and markets, including by leveraging local food purchase from smallholder farmers;
- Improving rural women's access to basic services and infrastructure by integrating social investments – such as water and sanitation, nutrition, health and education - and labour-saving technologies and practices into agricultural and rural economic development programmes;
- Strengthening women producers' organizations by building their capacities and supporting their participation in community, national and international decision-making processes;
- Providing food assistance in times of crisis and enhancing rural women's resilience to shocks without putting them at risk of abuse or violence as a result;
- Recognizing rural women and men as key stakeholders and powerful actors of change, and acknowledging the value of their experience and knowledge in the fight against hunger and poverty.

Because rural women have long shown ingenuity and resilience in the face of crisis, we can learn a lot from their capacity to overcome challenges. The UN system and the rest of the international development community are taking steps to open up and listen more closely to the voices from the field and from civil society, and specifically to the voices of women. FAO, IFAD and WFP are increasingly realizing that dialoguing with civil society is an integral component of “getting it right.” The process of broadening partnerships is therefore occurring both within the UN system itself, for example through the UN Country Teams approach, and also through progressive efforts to include rural peoples and their perspectives in decision-making fora. One example of this is the reform of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) where multi-stakeholders, including women's and civil society organizations, can now add their voice and input into the decision-making process.

Any progress requires political will, and more political commitment and concrete action are needed in order to feed this unacceptable number of food insecure people. Fortunately, world leaders and other members of the international community have shown a renewed interest in sustainable agriculture development and food security investments as a vehicle for poverty reduction and hunger alleviation. The L'Aquila Food Security Initiative announced last July

by the G8 leaders is an encouraging sign of the kind of determination and resources that are necessary to achieve this goal.

What needs to be done

As ECOSOC takes stock of the progress made towards achieving the MDGs, the UN Rome-based agencies urge accelerated and sustained efforts to support the critical role of rural women in the fight against poverty and hunger and to break the vicious circle of hunger, poverty, gender inequality and discrimination. In particular, we encourage both the international community and national authorities to take concrete action in the following areas:

- Increase investment in food security, agriculture and rural development – both ODA and domestic, ensuring that investments correspond to the different contributions men and women make, and allocate adequate shares of programming resources to support the economic empowerment and well-being of rural women and women farmers
- Promote productive and social safety nets, such as school feeding, child nutrition interventions and food-based job-and-asset creation programmes focused on the specific needs of female headed households and women and girls, to support risk reduction and rehabilitation measures.
- Design and implement comprehensive and effective food security and poverty reduction strategies that ensure equal opportunities for rural men and women and rural women's economic and social empowerment.
- Strengthen multistakeholder partnerships and global governance of food security with a greater focus on gender equality and the empowerment of rural women.
- Improve agriculture, food security and nutrition policies and ensure that they take into consideration the needs of both rural women and men.
- Eliminate gender imbalances in access to productive resources, services and safety nets by strengthening legal frameworks to promote gender equality and adopt measures to ensure women's equal access to productive resources, including the right to inheritance and to ownership of land and other property, credit, appropriate technologies, training, markets and information.
- Improve gender-disaggregated statistics and promote their use in policy making.

In closing, we call on Member States and the UN system to use the various intergovernmental events in 2010 and beyond, in particular the MDG Review Summit, to direct attention to gender equality and to the role of women in agriculture. We have the evidence. We know what needs to change. The only remaining challenge is the political commitment to do so.