



Intervention by Loretta de Luca (ILO) at the FAO seminar “Gender dimensions of rural employment” 3 April 2009, Rome



1. A quick overview of Decent Work and the Decent Work Agenda ...

Decent work can be defined as productive work, undertaken in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. The term was first used by ILO some 10 years ago to give structure and direction to its work; but it was rapidly endorsed by countries, then by the international community at highest levels (ex. in 2005 by the UN world Summit and in 2006 by ECOSOC). Indeed, it is a concept that connects with people (workers and employers, developed and developing countries, urban and rural areas, women and men), and reflects their aspirations.

Decent Work rests on four pillars: Employment creation (through entrepreneurship and small business development, training to increase employability, micro-finance, labour market institutions, etc.); Rights at work (through International Labour Standards - Conventions and Recommendations - formulated jointly by the three parties that constitute ILO - governments, employers and workers - to ensure that growth goes hand in hand with workers' rights); Social protection (comprising social security, occupational safety and health and working condition in general, including HIV/AIDS), to help people cope with life risks and promote social inclusion; and Social Dialogue (consisting of consultations and consensus-building among governments, employers and workers) to ensure maximum participation in decisions affecting the world of work). Two important notes: These four pillars are inseparable, interrelated and mutually supportive; that is, failure to promote any of them would harm progress on the others. And all four pillars are productive factors; that is, not only do they make sense ethically and socially, but they also make sense economically... “Decent work is good business” ... Gender equality and non discrimination are fundamental components and cut across all four pillars.

2. The remarkable weight and potential of women in rural work ...

A few figures:

- Agriculture is the most important sector for women in many countries; especially in Africa and Asia.
- In Africa and Asia women represent over 47% of rural employment. They reach 2/3 in Mozambique and some provinces of China for example; while in India women represent 47% of the fishing industry workforce.
- Rural women produce, process and store over half of the food grown worldwide. In Asia they produce 60% of food, in Africa as much as 80%; and as much as 90% of rice in South-East Asia
- Women provide some 90% of rural poor's food intake.



If we consider that in most countries women are still enduring formidable shackles; particularly wage rates much lower than men's, limited access to productive assets, to education and training and limited mobility, we can easily understand that grasping and tackling gender-related disadvantages could indeed unleash the remarkable potential of individual women, of agriculture and related industries, and that of whole communities.... Hence the tremendous importance of working and supporting work to unleash that potential!

3. What ILO can bring to a partnership with FAO and IFAD on rural employment ...

At ILO's International Labour Conference of June 2008, the Committee that discussed the item "Promotion of rural employment for poverty reduction" included in the Plan of Action is sketched for ILO, that it should "... coordinate efforts with other international agencies at both the international and country levels, for policy coherence, delivery as one and maximum impact". FAO was singled out, but IFAD was on the radar too.

ILO is indeed keen to establish and contribute meaningfully to such a partnership, through its ...

- Decent Work concept and all four pillars of its Decent Work Agenda, adapted to rural settings;
- Tripartism, namely its contacts with employers' and workers' organizations, techniques of understanding respective concerns and potential, of developing dialogue, mediating and consensus-building;
- Expertise in a number of technical areas, from employment creation to cooperatives, employment-intensive technology, local economic development, support to micro- and small enterprises (for instance through its methodology "Start and Improve your Business" - SIYB), micro-finance, social security schemes for the poorest, occupational safety and health (for instance its methodology Work Improvement for Neighbourhood Development - WIND, a community-based approach to improve safety and health and working and living conditions of small farmers and rural workers);
- Experience of work in rural employment, that was particularly rich in the 1980s and early 1990s, when ILO had a "Rural Employment Policies and Research Department" and a special "Programme on Rural Women";
- The commitment of ILO's Director General, who has just made rural employment a priority for next biennium, and has allowed as many as seven ILO officials to attend the FAO-IFAD-ILO technical workshop "Gaps, trends and current research in gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment: Differentiated pathways out of poverty";
- And last but not least ... Tremendous motivation from ILO officials to work side by side and tackle jointly with FAO and IFAD the challenges of rural employment and unleash the potential of rural women and men.

4. The way forward; a few ILO proposals for joint work ...

Three concrete proposals, complementing those formulated by Eve and supported by Rosemary, which ILO fully supports:

- Strengthen rural data and information gathering and processing in countries;
- Develop a user-friendly pedagogical tool on creating more and better jobs in rural areas, for decision makers and practitioners, based on the knowledge, tools and lessons learned from operational experience;

FAO-IFAD-ILO Workshop on Gaps, trends and
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- Engage immediately in joint ventures at country level, seizing available opportunities such as the MDG-Fund on the Private Sector in Costa Rica and Vietnam, and seeking actively opportunities. To create a momentum, send a clear message and call for joint action and joint initiatives to FAO, IFAD and ILO country representatives or colleagues following country operations from HQ, attaching to it the report of the FAO-IFAD-ILO technical workshop “Gaps, trends and current research in gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment: Differentiated pathways out of poverty”, as well as the report of today’s seminar that presents the outcome of that workshop and the way forward.