

Statement from the African Women's Regional Organizations to the 56th Session of the United Nations Commission on the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, 2012

"The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges."

Preamble:

RECOGNISING that according to the Food and Agriculture Organization, women in Africa, particularly rural and grassroots women are the backbone of the agricultural workforce, responsible for 60-80% of food production for both consumption and sale.

CONCERNED that high illiteracy rates among rural women, discriminatory legislation, social and cultural obstacles, and inadequate leadership and management skills hinder women's freedom of choice and mobility in the socio-economic context; and moreover that women's exclusion from relevant decision-making processes at community level, and within political parties, public institutions and professional organizations, has meant that the issues of most concern to women have been neglected.

Concerned also about the new phenomenon of land grabbing in the name of foreign investment, dispossessing and dislocating populations with severe consequences on the populations and more specifically on rural women.

FURTHER CONCERNED that the burden of HIV/AIDS, conflicts and disasters like drought and famine often falls disproportionately on poor women, weakening their resilience in terms of consumption adjustments, asset depletion, work burden, and in extreme cases, destitution and UNDERSCORING that the persistent patriarchal social norms, gender insensitive legislations and limited political will for rural women's empowerment relegate them to high levels of discrimination and vulnerability to food insecurity, disease, and violation of their human rights.

WE HEREBY CALL ON:

African Leaders and Governments to:

Comply and fully implement CEDAW and the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, as a fundamental principle for eliminating the prevailing disparities between women and men and promote and protect women's human rights;

Institute measures that enforce affirmative action and policies geared towards promotion of women's participation in decision making and in agriculture, cooperatives and trade and value chains in rural areas

Prioritize rural women and local communities' social security programmes with emphasis on rural women, orphans and vulnerable children, victims of disasters and other vulnerable groups.

Development partners to:

Support multi-lateral and bi-lateral trade agreements and investments that will increase recognition of more jobs and improve work conditions for rural women.

Support and scale up successful innovations and further research on rural women's development in Africa, including factors responsible for women's marginalisation in economic development, to encourage policy changes based on reliable, evidence based studies;

Civil Society Organizations to:

Monitor and evaluate governments' progress in delivering gender sensitive allocation and expenditure on agriculture and other sectors to ensure integrated gender-responsiveness and guard against corruption;

Increase partnership among rural women, civil society organizations and science and technology institutions to guarantee food security and sustainable development in Africa.