

Accelerating progress towards the economic empowerment of rural women CSW Side Event

Tuesday, 28 February 2012 from 3.00 to 4.30 pm in NLB CR 5

I. Background

Economic empowerment of rural women and girls is critical for addressing today's global challenges including food and nutrition insecurity, inequality, poverty and sustainable development. Rural women's contribution and leadership are critical to secure higher rates of agricultural growth and enhanced food security, enhance rural development and off-farm employment, reduce the intergenerational transmission of poverty and manage land and rural resources in a sustainable manner.

Rural women and girls hold much of the knowledge needed to increase food and nutrition security, prevent environmental degradation and maintain agricultural biodiversity. They are often the main producers, processors and traders of food and responsible for the bulk of food production in many developing countries. They are custodians and users of traditional knowledge, including on climate resilience, and managers of seeds.

The renewed international attention, including by the private sector, to the agricultural sector provides an opportunity to increase recognition of and support to rural women and girls. Legislative reforms and policy frameworks at the national level need to be reviewed to provide an enabling environment for the empowerment of rural women and girls both on and off the farm. Countries and rural communities need protection from the adverse consequences of global shocks and crises, including climate change.

Initiatives have been carried out to enhance rural women's access to productive resources (including land) and develop their skills and capacity for innovation so as to meet quality standards, improve access to markets and technology. However, much remains to be done. Initiatives that work need to be scaled up and partnerships strengthened between governments, donors, academia, civil society and the private sector.

In the global environment in which food and nutrition security are drawing ever-increasing attention, and with this year's CSW session addressing the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, this interactive dialogue will focus on the urgent need to accelerate progress towards the economic empowerment of rural women and girls. Recommendations emanating from the discussion will feed into overall discussions on rural women and sustainable development, including the preparations of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, to be held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012.

Within this context, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the World Food Programme (WFP) have agreed to join forces and bring a comprehensive United Nations system response in support of rural women's and girls' economic empowerment. The four organizations each bring a distinct comparative advantage to the promotion of the economic empowerment of rural women: FAO's specialist technical knowledge and policy assistance on agriculture and food security; IFAD's targeted rural investment programmes, WFP's food assistance innovations; and UN Women's technical knowledge and catalytic initiatives

on rural women's economic empowerment. This interactive event provides an opportunity for Member States and other stakeholders to engage in a dialogue and bring this momentum forward.

II. Objective, focus and format of discussion

The event will address the following key issues with the view to identify key joint actions:

- Legislative and policy reforms to unlock the bottlenecks to rural women's and girls' economic empowerment; and opportunities to create and promote gender-responsive public policies using innovative approaches and partnerships, and with the active participation of rural women and girls in the decision-making processes.
- Scale up of initiatives to expand rural women's access to productive resources, finance, markets, services, infrastructure, and global and regional value chains;
- Proactive strategic approaches—short and long term—to strengthen rural women's and girls' livelihood resilience in the context of the world financial and economic crisis, the volatile food and energy prices and food and nutrition insecurity.

The speakers and participants will engage in an interactive dialogue without formal presentations. The moderator will ask speakers and participants to respond to specific questions relevant in line with the above issues.

III. Speakers and participants

Opening remarks: Ms. Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director, UN-Women

Ms. Sheila Sisulu, Deputy Executive Director, World Food Programme

Moderator: Ms. Saraswathi Menon, Director of Policy, UN-Women

Panelists: H.E. Eleonora Menicucci de Oliveira, Minister, Secretariat of Policies for Women, Brazil

H.E. Shirrin Sharmin Chowdhury, State Minister of Women's and Children's Affairs of Bangladesh

H.E. Mr. Guillermo E. Rishchynski, Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations, Government of Canada

Interactive dialogue: Ms. Lilly Be'Soer, Voice for Change, Papua New Guinea;

Ms. Elisabeth Atangana, President, Pan-African Farmers' Organization, Cameroon;

Ms. Claudia Serrano, Executive Director of the Latin American Center for Rural Development (former Minister of Labour of Chile).

Representatives from governments and civil society will be invited to join in the interactive dialogue.

Closing remarks: Ms. Ann Tutwiler, Deputy Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Ms. Cheryl Morden, Director of the North American Liaison Office, International Fund for Agricultural Development