



Enabling the rural poor
to overcome poverty

63rd Session General Assembly – Third Committee
Agenda Item 56: Advancement of Women
15 October 2008

Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address the Third Committee today on behalf of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) as the Committee takes up agenda item 56 on the advancement of women. As this is my first opportunity to address this Committee, please allow me to begin by offering you, Mr. Chairman, my congratulations on your election and my best wishes on guiding this Committee and its important work.

Mr. Chairman,

Women are the hardest hit by the current food crisis and particularly vulnerable groups, such as young children and pregnant women, are now at increased risk of malnutrition.

One of the underlying causes of today's rising food insecurity is the failure of productivity to keep pace with growing demand due to population growth, rising incomes, and urbanization. The past forty years have seen steep declines in the productivity of maize, wheat, and rice. At the same time, demand for cereals – for food, feed, and fuel, have increased substantially.

Women feed the world. In many parts of the world women are the main farmers and producers. This is especially the case in the poorest countries, where agriculture is highly labor-intensive. Women contribute more than half of the labor required to produce the food eaten in developing countries. And in Africa, women provide some three-fourths of the labor for food production. Yet, women's role in food production is largely unrecognized and greatly underappreciated.

Gender inequalities along the food production chain contribute to today's food and nutritional insecurity. There is a deep gulf between the world's reliance on food produced by women and the things women need to grow and market that food, such as land, tools, seeds, information, credit and market access. Women's access to resources and opportunities is much lower than those of men and that severely limits their ability to move from subsistence agriculture to higher value-chains.

So, going forward, the Comprehensive Framework for Action to boost agricultural productivity and improve food security needs to include specific, concrete steps to recognize, understand, and address the barriers created by gender roles, rights, and responsibilities to enable women to produce more food and to better integrate women in agricultural production value chains.

Mr. Chairman,

On the occasion of the first observance of the International Day of Rural Women IFAD, FAO, the World Bank and other partners have launched the Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook, a milestone publication that provides an up-to-date understanding of gender issues in agriculture, ranging from water, land, markets, to natural resource management, infrastructure and governance. It compiles good practice and lessons learned. It guides practitioners and policy makers on how to mainstream gender issues in development projects, to invest more in developing the capacity of women farmers through education and skills development and to strengthen female representation in public and private institutions. As such, it is an important companion to the Comprehensive Framework for Action. The production of the sourcebook has strengthened collaboration between the three agencies WB, FAO and IFAD on gender in agriculture. In the follow-up, more joint work at the operational and normative level is envisaged.

Mr. Chairman,

IFAD recognizes that to maximize the impact of agricultural development on food security, it is necessary to enhance the role of women as farmers and producers. Gender equality and women's empowerment have been gaining increasing importance for IFAD – both as institutional objectives and as instruments for poverty reduction.

In the course of this year, IFAD has enhanced its support of women in leadership positions in farmer's organizations. The farmer's forum organized in parallel to the meeting of IFAD's Governing Board saw for the first time a separate meeting of women leaders that gave impetus to pay greater attention to gender equality. A programme to support women in leadership positions in farmers' organizations is in preparation. Special attention is given to equal representation of women and men in farmers' organization.

IFAD has also supported the role of women in decision-making at higher levels. Together with Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN) and Heifer International, IFAD initiated the launch of the Network of Women Agriculture Ministers and Leaders, which met for the first time in May 2008 during the high level segment of CSD-16 in New York.

In closing, I would like to reiterate IFAD's commitment to work with all partners to increase food security in rural areas and improve the situation of rural women through greater gender equality.

Thank you.