



**65th Session of the United Nations General Assembly Third Committee
General discussion on the agenda item 28: Advancement of women
by Ms. Lila Hanitra Ratsifandrihamanana, Director, FAO Liaison Office with the United Nations
13 October 2010**

Mr. Chairperson

I join my voice to that of the previous speakers to congratulate you and to assure you of FAO's support during the deliberations of the Committee.

FAO's new strategic framework adopted in November 2009 identifies gender equity as one of the organization's key objectives for the next 10 years to be mainstreamed in all of our programmes for agriculture and rural development. In this context, the FAO's report on the State of Food and Agriculture, SOFA, to be released next year will have women and agriculture as its focus.

FAO's latest estimates of 925 million hungry and malnourished people in 2010 mark an improvement compared to last year's spike in world hunger of 1 billion persons. However it is still far from the target expressed at the WFS of 1996. As stipulated in the outcome document of the recent Summit on MDGs, the focus should be on investing in agriculture in developing countries so they can produce the food needed for a world population expected to exceed 9 billion in 2050. No initiative to address the problem of food insecurity can succeed without taking into account gender equality. Women make up 51 percent of the agricultural labour force worldwide and participate in all the stages of food production.

In many parts of the world agriculture is becoming feminized as women increasingly become major actors in the sector. Women also play active roles as traders, processors, and entrepreneurs, despite facing many obstacles in market access. However, the role of women farmers is still largely unrecognized and the design of many development policies continues to assume incorrectly that farmers and rural workers are mainly men.

Available evidence indicates that the distribution of land ownership is heavily skewed toward men. Roughly 70 to 90 percent of formal owners of farmland are men in many Latin American countries and similar patterns are seen in Sub Saharan Africa. Evidence also suggests that strengthening women's land rights can significantly increase income and families' welfare. Property grabbing from women and children is common.

Therefore, gender issues must be addressed in the agriculture sector, where gender inequality in access to and control over resources are persistent, undermining a sustainable and inclusive development of the sector. Not taking gender issues into account may result in projects that are technically successful but that negatively affect both women and children and augment social and economic stratification.

As reflected both in the 2010 Ministerial Declaration of ECOSOC and the Outcome of the recent Millennium Summit, rural women should be given equal participation in decision making processes.

Gender equality will be essential to implementing the decisions of the World Summit on Food Security, held in Rome in November 2009.

FAO is currently undertaking a gender audit in collaboration with UNIFEM (now a part of UN Women) which will offer recommendations on strengthening FAO's overall institutional capability to promote gender equality in its work and develop an accountability framework for ensuring greater responsiveness in this area. Besides, a gender evaluation is led by FAO's internal but independent Office of Evaluation. Its purpose is to review FAO's work and progress on gender at the technical and project/programme level and to identify opportunities so as to deliver better results within the New Strategic Framework.

In closing, Mr. Chairperson, FAO welcomes the creation of UN Women and the appointment of Madame Bachelet as its Head. This new gender architecture will play a pivotal role in coordinating the UN System on strategies, policies and programmes for gender equality and empowerment, and FAO looks forward to working with the Under- Secretary General and her team.