

**Rural women's empowerment is key to food security, nutrition and poverty reduction**

**FAO's contribution to the CEDAW Half-Day General Discussion on Rural Women**

Geneva, 7 October 2013

Ms Chairperson,

Distinguished Committee Members, Delegates and Colleagues,

FAO welcomes the decision of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to issue a general recommendation on rural women.

FAO is proud to be one of the UN agencies that has advocated for an in-depth analysis of the situation of rural women and the preparation of a general recommendation.

The objective of this oral statement is to bring to the Committee's attention additional issues where the reduction of discrimination against rural women is particularly relevant to the eradication of food insecurity, malnutrition and poverty.

FAO, therefore, proposes that the Committee also addresses the following five priority issues and includes related actions in the General Recommendation on Rural Women.

**Firstly.** Although women contribute substantially to agriculture work, their voices and concerns are often not taken into account at the national and global levels because of their weak presence in leadership positions in rural institutions and organizations.

Therefore, the General Recommendation should address the need for change in rural institutions and recommend that State Parties promote rural women's leadership and participation in rural institutions and in shaping laws, policies and programmes.

**Secondly.** Social Protection initiatives rely on a generalized assumption that by targeting women, these initiatives are able to contribute towards women's economic and social empowerment. However, the role that gender relations play in social protection effectiveness is more complex and these initiatives can perpetuate existing inequalities.

Therefore the General Recommendation should emphasize the broadening of Social Protection programs to better respond to women's needs, opportunities and constraints and offer a wide spectrum of options in the areas of agriculture production, employment, and economic empowerment.

**Thirdly.** Gender inequalities in access to rural advisory services continue to hinder rural women's possibilities to realize their full potential in agriculture. These services often fail to recognize the differentiated constraints, roles and responsibilities of rural women and men and the necessity to develop targeted and innovative interventions.

Therefore, the General Recommendation should underscore the urgency to employ an increased number of women extension/advisory staff and to improve the design and delivery of demand-driven rural advisory services that recognize women as farmers and clients for these services.

**Fourthly.** Rural women are often the more negatively affected by natural disasters, and their contribution to disaster risk reduction and management is also often overlooked.

The General Recommendation should emphasize the need for mitigation of the impact of disasters by better understanding the socially constructed vulnerabilities of specific groups of affected people.

**Finally.** Women's limited access to productive resources, knowledge and technology can lead to substantial food losses and waste. Apart from the economic loss, in most cases the deterioration in quality of food goes along with a significant loss in nutritional value, thereby affecting health and food security.

The General Recommendation should emphasize the need for building rural women's technical knowledge in food harvesting techniques, preservation, storage, and processing, packaging and marketing systems.

FAO is looking forward to continuing the dialogue on Rural Women, especially in the lead-up to the adoption of the General Recommendation and in supporting its Member Countries in the full implementation of CEDAW.

Thank you very much.