



UN-Women, Ann Tutwiler, Deputy Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), on behalf of FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and WFP, and Elisabeth Atangana, President of the Pan-African Farmers' Organization.

3. Participants welcomed the Commission's consideration of the priority theme. Rural women and girls constitute a sizeable share of the global population, and are important actors for economic and social development at the local and national levels. Rural women play an important role in agriculture in all parts of the world and carry out a wide range of agricultural and non-agricultural work in addition to domestic tasks, such as caring for children and the elderly. They play a crucial role in ensuring and promoting food security and nutrition in all parts of the world. The centrality of rural women to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, is increasingly recognized.

4. However, rural women and girls remain disadvantaged in many areas compared to rural men and boys, and to urban women and girls. Poverty continues to be a predominantly rural phenomenon, with a heavy toll on women and girls. The impact of global crises, including the world financial and economic crisis, volatile food and energy prices and food insecurity, also disproportionately affect rural women.

5. Lack of and limited access to land and other productive resources remain major obstacles to overcoming poverty and hunger for rural women. A number of countries have adopted legal and constitutional provisions to improve women's access to land, including provisions for land tenure rights and joint land titles for spouses. However, broader gender-responsive land reforms would be required to ensure women's equal access to and ownership of land.

6. Lack of land ownership limits women's ability to borrow. Many countries promote access to finance for poor women in rural areas, in particular through microcredit programmes, often combined with financial literacy, entrepreneurship, management and related types of training. Access to loans without collateral, subsidized or interest-free loans, or reserving a specific percentage of bank credit for women, are also effective measures to expand financing. However, for rural women to sustain and expand their businesses and increase agricultural productivity, they need access to mainstream "macro" financial services. Women's cooperatives have been instrumental in providing women with collective access to financial services.

7. While women play an important role in food production, they continue to face limited access to markets. Some countries have developed programmes to purchase local agricultural produce from family farming for schools, hospitals and other public institutions through governmental entities. Women farmers are being specifically targeted and are paid good prices for their produce. Increased access of women to farming

millet, cassava and sorghum, which are primarily produced by women farmers, are specifically promoted through agricultural policies and programmes.

9. Rural and remote areas are characterized by a lack of public infrastructure, including roads and public transportation, water and sanitation facilities, modern energy sources and information and communications technology resources. This lack of infrastructure compounds rural women's heavy work burden and related time poverty. Increased investment in infrastructure can alleviate women's large — and often unpaid — burden of work, on the farm, in non-agricultural income-generating activities and in the household. Initiatives such as the installation of water pumps, food-processing equipment and energy sources help to reduce women's workload, thus freeing time for education, skills training and remunerative activities.

10. Recognizing the need for greater employment opportunities in rural areas, some countries have adopted laws to boost rural employment generation and have put in place employment guarantee programmes. Many efforts have also focused on entrepreneurship training for rural women to enable them to take advantage of micro and small business opportunities in various sectors. Steps have been taken to redress gender-based labour market segregation by offering rural women vocational training for non-traditional jobs, such as auto mechanics and electricians, or in emerging markets and sectors such as rural infrastructure, agrotourism and ecotourism. Such initiatives play an important role in increasing women's economic opportunities in rural areas, thus slowing young women's migration to urban areas. However, migration to cities is a reality for many rural women, and training programmes need to impart skills that enable women to reduce vulnerabilities that they may face in new environments, including in regard to employment opportunities.

11. The informal nature of much of rural employment, weak or non-existent labour standards and rights and poor implementation of national legislation and regulation contribute greatly to rural women's vulnerability to poverty and hunger. In order to remedy such risks, social protection systems in some countries have contributed to safeguarding a minimum level of access to essential services and income security. Some governments support vulnerable groups of rural women through targeted grants, conditional cash transfers and school feeding programmes for poor households living outside the reach of social insurance. Several countries have

new health facilities, training midwives and providing free health care for pregnant

19. A human rights-based approach grounded in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is essential to the empowerment of rural women. The Convention has a specific article — article 14 — dedicated to the situation of rural women, which calls on States parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against them. The Convention in general and article 14 in particular should thus consistently guide national efforts aimed at rural development.

20. Family law, as well as property, inheritance and social security laws, need to be regularly reviewed, monitored and evaluated to identify and rectify any direct or indirect discrimination against rural women and girls. As civil registration is the basis for the exercise of many rights, concerted efforts are needed to ensure that all rural women and girls are registered. Furthermore, in many countries, rural women continue to lack the national identification documents required to exercise their right to vote, to own and inherit property, to apply for loans and to access basic services. The provision of such documents ensures that rural women are treated as citizens with equal rights. In order to exercise their rights, rural women must be aware of their rights and have access to information and legal services. Awareness-raising campaigns and national days of rural women have proven useful in that regard.

21. Policies and programmes should take into account not only the differences between urban and rural groups, but also recognize that rural women do not constitute a homogeneous group. Their circ

empowerment of rural women remains sparse, and might even be decreasing in the current context of global crises. More efforts are needed to reach the official development assistance target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income and to ensure that rural women benefit from such cooperation. Local initiatives spearheaded by rural women should benefit from international financing. In addition, the entities of the United Nations system should prioritize gender-responsive agricultural and rural development in their support to Member States at the national level.

25. South-South cooperation should also be promoted, as it can be an effective tool for sharing and replicating proven solutions for empowering women. Countries that have successfully integrated the needs of smallholder farmers, in particular women farmers, into national agricultural and rural development policies, should