



International Alliance of Women



INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN

Equal Rights - Equal Responsibilities



ALLIANCE INTERNATIONALE DES FEMMES

Droits Égaux - Responsabilités Égales

Food and Agricultural Organization  
of the United Nations  
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Statement presented by the International Alliance of Women, Equal Rights – Equal  
Responsibilities

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates and Observers,

We would like to thank the organisers of this Conference for this kind invitation to address this distinguished audience. We do so with humility but also with a sense of confidence and responsibility of the great role that organisations, such as ours, have played and will continue to play in this great struggle to alleviate hunger and poverty. The membership of INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN is vast and varied. We are an International Women's non-governmental organisation and we have Observer Status throughout the entire UN system.

International Alliance of Women welcomes FAO's excellent, comprehensive 2010-2011 THE STATE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE REPORT prepared for this Conference "with its special emphasis on "Women in Agriculture – Closing the Gender Gap". FAO in its commitment towards the implementation of its own programme and the MDGs, in particular Goal 3 recognises the importance of promoting the full and equal participation of rural women and men in all its efforts to improve food security and to ensure a reduction of poverty. Furthermore, the Organisation states that it champions the elimination of all obstacles that prevent the equal participation of rural women in decision-making processes, in the obtaining of decent employment opportunities, access to, and control of resources such as land, water, training, credit, and technology.

The key factors to be noted of the worth and value of women's activities in Agriculture and Rural Development are provided in FAO's fact sheet on its commitment to the implementation of **Millennium Development Goal 3**. There is no need to repeat this. But, what does need to be stated is that this "theoretical" acceptance of the worth and value of women in Agriculture and Rural Development, receives very little practical programme support by FAO. Whenever help and assistance is offered to this poor women's farming and rural development sector, it often takes the form of short-lived, experimental, or pilot projects. These limited in scope kinds of projects do not have the capability of moving into medium term and long term planning national schemes to alleviate hunger and poverty. We note that any help given to this, up to now, poorly served agricultural sector of the society will improve the gross domestic economic growth figures in most societies.

In fact, What women **do not see** happening, in any substantive manner, are the ways and means to implement that commitment in any of the proposed FAO's Action Plans for Food Security, although this firm and stated commitment by FAO to implement MDG 3 is in line with the Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) – and Article 14 on Rural Women.

On the basis of the above and in the light of FAO's commitment to women's full participation in agriculture and rural sustainable development IAW would like to propose the following:-

- That relevant FAO Committees set up a special working group to design a priority programme to ensure the best involvement and use of women's *on the basis of farming and rural development activities in its food security programme and experience of the BRAZILIAN ZERO HUNGER PROGRAMME.*
- That the division for Gender equality be included in this process.

Why are we making this suggestion to the Conference?

The need for decisive progress on the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger as addressed in Goal 1 of the MDGs is critical for the achievement of progress in other MDGs.

We must all face the stark reality that very little progress to alleviate hunger and poverty has been achieved since the World Food Summit – and the fact that since that World Food Summit, the absolute number of people living in extreme poverty has increased worldwide future strategies must incorporate alternative development thinking. A type of agriculture which would encourage small farmers- women and men- and farming communities – to become independent and self-reliant in the production of stable foods for themselves and for their local and regional markets.

In any strategies produced by FAO there has to be recognition of the fact that the majority of people living in extreme poverty in the rural areas are women and their families. As stated in UNIDO's publication Agribusiness for Africa's Prosperity "a key first step (may be) in exploiting and recognizing small holder farms as agribusinesses regardless of their size and scale"....."so they may no longer remain trapped in a cycle of subsistence".

Therefore, any attempt by FAO to alleviate poverty and hunger must address gender discrimination and violence against women. This attempt must be geared towards poor women living in the rural areas to have full participation in sustainable rural development in the exercise of their Human Rights.

In conclusion, the rising cost of food will inevitably increase the number of hungry people- and people living in extreme poverty. IAW would like to see FAO approaching this problem of hunger and poverty and raising food prices with a sense of urgency and responsibility.

Thank you again for your kind invitation to speak to you today. In doing so, you are not only honouring the work and activities of our Alliance but you are paying homage to the millions of women who everyday feed their families from their labour and work in the rural areas of the world.