

ECOSOC Round Table on Coherence: Strengthening the normative and operational link
in the work of the UN on rural employment
9 July 2008, 10 a.m. –1:00 pm

Speaking notes of the Chairperson of Commission on the Status of Women

General overview of women and rural employment

- Rural employment is a critical means for the eradication of poverty and hunger, especially for rural women who make up the majority of the poor in rural areas. In many parts of the world, rural women play critical roles in food crop production, livestock care, and off-farm activities which are essential for sustainable livelihoods and household food security. According to the FAO, rural women in developing countries are responsible for between 60 and 80 percent of food production and they grow most of the secondary crops that provide the diversity needed for a healthy diet.
- The need for explicit attention to the contributions, priorities and needs of rural women has been highlighted in the context of the current food crisis and the enhanced attention to combating climate change.
- There are concerns that women's employment in rural areas does not provide decent levels of income and sustainable livelihoods. Women tend to be disadvantaged, compared to men, including in terms of benefits as well as exposure to occupational safety and health risks. A significant number of women are involved in seasonal, casual or temporary employment with limited job security.
- Women face persistent inequalities in relation to land and property rights and access to credit for land and water improvements. Women tend to receive less training and agricultural extension support, including new technologies and seeds, than men. Women's unequal access to essential resources significantly limits their potential to ensure sustainable livelihoods and food security for households and communities.
- Although in many developing countries the agricultural sector is still the main employer of rural women, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, rural households are finding it increasingly difficult to support themselves with land-based activities alone and are turning to other sources of income. The extent, to which women can benefit from the diversification into non-traditional agricultural products, including for export, partly depends on the nature of the production process and on property rights, especially, the ownership and control of land.
- Microcredit programmes can be a viable poverty alleviation strategy, but such programmes must be designed and managed in a gender-sensitive manner if they are to empower women. Women also need access to other financial services, such as savings mobilization.

Policy directives related to rural employment

There are important policy directives related to women and rural employment from a number of different intergovernmental processes:

- The Beijing Platform for Action called for:
 - the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes that enhance the access of women producers in rural areas to financial and extension services; land, infrastructure and technology in order to increase their incomes and promote household food security (para 58n); and
 - enhanced access of disadvantaged women, including women entrepreneurs, in rural areas, to financial services through strengthening links between the formal banks and intermediary lending organizations (para 62a)
- The outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly called for the adoption of measures to ensure that the work of rural women is recognized and valued in order to enhance their economic security, their access to and control over resources and credit schemes, services and benefits, and their empowerment. (94 (e))
- The CSW resolution on economic advancement (49/8), called on Member States to: enhance rural women's income-generating potential and to consider special temporary measures to empower women in the rural sector to meet the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities of agricultural market liberalization; (paragraph 10)
- The 2008 CSW agreed conclusions on financing for gender equality called for:
 - establishing and funding of active labour market policies devoted to the promotion of full and productive employment and decent work for all (21z), access to microfinance tools, including microcredit for poverty eradication, employment generation (21 bb);
 - legislative and administrative reforms that would give women full and equal access to economic resources, including the right to inheritance and ownership of land and other property and credit (21 cc); and
 - an increase in women's access to and control over bank loans, mortgages and other forms of financial credit (21 dd).
- I welcome the fact that the 2008 Commission for Social Development resolution on promoting full employment and decent work drew attention to the situation of rural women and encouraged:

- Governments to continue to pursue the creation of a conducive environment for enterprise development in both rural and urban areas, including by giving particular attention to policies that promote micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, cooperatives and other forms of social enterprises and the participation and entrepreneurship of women, including rural women, through, inter alia, improved administrative regimes for the registration of small businesses, access to microcredit, social security systems and information on markets and new technology, as well as improved regulations. (para 18)

The way forward – linking the normative and the operational

The need to strengthen the links between the normative and operational work of the United Nations on all development issues, including rural employment, has been acknowledged by various intergovernmental bodies. I would like to offer a few suggestions on ways to strengthen this link from the perspective of the CSW,

- The outcomes of the functional commissions are not widely disseminated to UN entities and other stakeholders. Those outcomes related to rural employment, including specifically on rural women, should be systematically and widely disseminated to UN entities at headquarters and at country level, as well as to other stakeholders. New and innovative means of dissemination are needed.
- UN entities should be encouraged to provide technical assistance to ensure implementation of the recommendations on rural employment contained in the outcomes of intergovernmental processes at national level and to monitor progress in this area.
- The gender perspectives should be identified and addressed in all efforts to implement normative outcomes on rural employment at national level. This requires systematic use of gender analysis.
- Production of sex-disaggregated data should be strengthened to ensure accurate gender-sensitive assessment of implementation of the normative outcomes on rural employment at national level.
- Gender-sensitive indicators and other tools, such as gender impact assessments, also need to be developed to improve assessment of the impact of policies and programmes on rural employment and gender equality.