

Address by
Mr. Mohamed Elkeiy
Officer-in-Charge
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Commission on the Status of Women, fifty-sixth session

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Madam Chair,

It is with great pleasure that UNCTAD addresses the Commission on the Status of Women, which has dedicated this session to the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication.

As an organization mandated to address the trade and development challenges of the developing world, UNCTAD is acutely aware of the important role played by women in key economic sectors of importance for poverty reduction, particularly in agriculture. Indeed, in many cultures, it is the women who work the fields. And yet, they are often ignored in policies to support the sector. In this context, UNCTAD's research work has begun to devote special attention to the impacts of trade policy and trade liberalization on women as producers and as consumers of agricultural and food products. UNCTAD is also working to include a gender-dimension in its other policies and projects to support the agricultural sector in developing countries.

As the expansion of agricultural capacities and food production is crucial for fighting hunger and alleviating poverty, and is a critical component of an inclusive growth strategy, UNCTAD undertakes activities that focus on building productive capacities in developing and least developed countries to enable them to attract more investments, upgrade technologically, diversify their production and better integrate into the world economy.

Small-holder agricultural producers in developing countries – and women in particular – face significant supply-side constraints that hinder their ability to reach markets and meet market requirements. They suffer from a lack of information on prices and product requirements and they usually have limited capacity to meet increasingly stringent product standards. As financiers have typically found it risky to extend financing to small farmers, access to finance is another obstacle for small farmers in developing countries. The dismantling of public entities involved in the provision of agricultural extension services, including seeds, fertilizer and other inputs, advice and extension services, logistics services and quality control has further exacerbated the marginalization of small producers within global markets. In the case of women, all of these obstacles are exacerbated by gender bias, which often asserts itself not just in attitudes, but also in legal frameworks.

UNCTAD has adopted an integrated approach to tackle these supply-side deficiencies through three operative components, namely (i) Market information; (ii) Market intelligence; and (iii) Marketing services.

(i) To enhance market information and transparency, UNCTAD is promoting the development of national market information systems for gathering, processing and disseminating market information on prices, quality requirements, etc. Pilot schemes have been implemented in Cameroon, some Pacific Island countries as well as the Caribbean. The challenge ahead is to customize these tools to meet gender-specific constraints that women may face in accessing and using the information.

(ii) Public-private partnerships for standards compliance: Our projects include a component assessing the costs of compliance with safety and quality standards; a training component, and a marketing component meant to promote marketing links between small producers and

supermarkets and other outlets. Pilot projects were implemented in Ghana and in a number of Pacific island States.

(iii) Innovative agricultural commodity financing instruments: UNCTAD's activities in this area have focused on new financing methods (warehouse receipt system, supply chain finance schemes, etc.) to enhance access to finance for the agricultural sector. These tools tend to focus on the borrower's performance capacity rather than on traditional loan security such as land and other collaterals. Accordingly, they have the potential to significantly enhance rural women's access to finance, given women's dynamic potential and the gender-specific constraints that, in many contexts, limit their access to land and other physical assets.

In addition, UNCTAD is conducting a series of country case studies to assess the impact of trade policy on women. Many interesting lessons are emerging from this analysis. Let me therefore share with you some findings from one of our country-case studies: Bhutan.

Bhutan's exporters face obstacles in the markets of destination due to technical and legal requirements imposed by the importing countries. Compliance with these requirements can be particularly challenging for women due to gender gaps in education and gender biases in the delivering of support services. Some of key measures needed to overcome these barriers are measures to better integrate Bhutan's small agricultural producers, including women, in supply chains. By linking small producers to a guaranteed buyer who will also supply inputs, know-how, equipment and finance, these schemes can help Bhutanese farmers integrate into global supply chains and reach global markets.

Madam Chair,

As you may know, UNCTAD will hold its XIII quadrennial Ministerial Conference in Doha, Qatar, from 21st to 26th April 2012. The overarching theme

of the Conference is *Development-centred globalization: towards inclusive and sustainable growth and development*. The Conference will feature a High-level event on *Women in Development* to be held on 23rd April. One of the sessions of the Event will be devoted to agriculture and it is our hope that it will yield new insights into agricultural production, intellectual property, food security and rural women's empowerment.

On behalf of UNCTAD, I very much look forward to seeing many of you at UNCTAD XIII.

Thank you, Madam Chair.