Taking action now to end violence against women is the clear and urgent call of the 2013 International Year.

The oppression of hunger and poverty afflict 870 million undernourished people worldwide¹, with women particularly affected in their roles as income generators, producers, mothers, and managers of their families. Rural women are especially vulnerable given lack of access to education, information and resources, social inequalities and gender-discriminatory ideologies about agricultural roles and rights, in spite of comprising 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force worldwide and 50 per cent or more in Africa and Eastern Asia².

These constraints underlie the burdens and injustices inflicted on these women daily in multiple ways at a very young age, from exceedingly long hours of work at home and in the field to the drudgery of tasks like fetching water and fuel, from exposure to debilitating smoke and fumes when cooking to lack of access to the land, water, agricultural inputs, technology and knowledge necessary to improve and sustain their own and their families’ livelihoods. Together, these comprise a “silent violence”³, their chronic effect damaging women’s lives and opportunities every day.

This is why there is broad agreement that women’s empowerment is fundamental to achieving real, long lasting change. Women must be able to speak and act from a position of strength, with their rights and central importance to their villages and countries recognized and valued. Rural women must be at the heart of decision-making on allocation of resources and empowered through opportunity for growth and change.

Single institutions and individuals cannot address these immense challenges alone and GFAR Stakeholders are working together in a collective movement for change. Launched at the first Global Conference on Women in Agriculture in New Delhi, March 2012, the Gender in Agriculture Partnership (GAP)⁴ is a multi-stakeholder network, developed from the passion and commitment of individuals across many civil, national and international institutions, promoting gender equity and women’s empowerment in the agricultural sector in order to increase production and productivity, value-addition and incomes, reduce losses and wastage, and ensure food and nutrition security, particularly at the household level.

By re-conceptualizing agriculture as a vehicle for household and community well-being, not only for production, GAP is promoting transformative changes in five priority action areas, to respond to directly expressed needs of rural women:

1) Making women/gender aspects in agriculture more visible and recognized
2) Strengthening the evidence and knowledge base to address gender/women’s issues in agriculture
3) Promoting collective action and leadership of rural women in order to take advantage of opportunities and address discrimination
4) Establishing and enforcing women’s rights at large
5) Promoting women’s ownership and access to productive resources

GAP partners are united in addressing the causes underlying the inequalities and lack of opportunities for rural women. Together we can end the silent violence!

¹FAO’s The State of World Food Insecurity 2012
²FAO’s The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11 Women in agriculture: closing the gender gap for development
³Professor Michael Watts (1983) on the economic, social and political conditions creating hunger in Silent Violence: Food, Famine and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria, University of California Press
⁴http://www.gender-gap.net - Partners already mobilized through the Global Forum on Agricultural Research (GFAR) are from UN Agencies (UN Women, FAO, WFP & IFAD), World Bank, the CGIAR, Regional Fora, national institutions, civil society, farmers and the private sector. See also the Gender in Agriculture page of the GFAR website: http://www.egfar.org/our-work/transforming-institutions/gender-agriculture