

**Address of the FAO Representative, Mr. Edouard K. TAPSOBA
at the Workshop organised by the Rural Women National Network of Senegal
within the Dimitra¹ framework.**

Thies 25 – 27 February 2003

Madam Minister
Mister Representatives
Mister Governor
Mister Vice President of the Administrative Board of Enda Tiers-Monde
Madam President of the National Rural Women Network of Senegal
Madam Mayor of Thies
Ladies and gentlemen representing the Belgian Cooperation
Dear Colleagues of UNIFEM
Ladies representing the rural organisations
Ladies and Gentlemen representing the different Development agencies
Dear Friend Participants

It's a real pleasure to be among you today, surrounded by all of those women and men who are feeding and bringing life into their communities and countries through their hard work. I would like to convey my greetings to all the representatives of rural women organisations who are here to see the fruits of their work being highlighted and valued thanks to this workshop. I congratulate Enda Pronat, the Dimitra Partner for French Speaking West Africa, for their dynamic approach and for organising this event.

On behalf of the Director General of FAO, I would also like to thank the Belgian Government, in particular the Development Cooperation, which is represented at this workshop. As you know, the Belgian Government funds the Dimitra Project. It therefore seems only right to publicly express our gratitude towards the Belgian Government, not only for its support but also for their real commitment in the field of gender equality.

I am particularly happy to be in the midst of this mainly female gathering, since FAO has always been particularly attentive to the issue of women and their role in ensuring food security in many countries.

During the World Food Summit in 1996, the FAO Director General, Mr. Jacques Diouf, emphasised the “formidable potential” of women to meet the food challenge of the 21st century. Here in Senegal, the heavy involvement of women in production, processing and marketing of agricultural products, perfectly illustrates the slogan of a publication from FAO's World Food Day: **“Women Feed the World”**.

I would also like to take advantage of this opportunity, to express FAO's satisfaction at the total mobilization of women in implementing the SPFS programme in Senegal: a programme aimed at quickly increasing sustainable food production in this country.

Unfortunately, women's work nevertheless remains poorly understood and underestimated. Women are often the invisible actors in development.

The chosen theme, “Rural Women's Access to Land”, is of the utmost importance for the future and for sustainable development. Here in Senegal, this theme comes just at the right time

¹ Dimitra : goddess of agriculture in Ancient Greece

in so far as it was accorded particular attention by His Excellency the President, Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, and the Government during Rural World Day in October last year.

I would therefore like to take advantage of this occasion to renew FAO's commitment to rural women, the majority of whom are farmers, as crucial partners in the fight against hunger, malnutrition and poverty. Already in 1996, at the World Food Summit, heads of state and governments committed themselves to "ensuring an enabling political, social, and economic environment, based on full and equal participation of women and men".

In its 2000 - 2015 Strategic Framework, adopted in 1999, FAO defined five major fields of action which all contribute to the eradication of food insecurity and rural poverty and work to suppress all forms of inequality including disparities in access to resources and development benefits between men and women, particularly in rural areas.

In November 2001, during the 31st Session, FAO developed a new Action Plan for women entitled 'Gender and Development' This Plan aimed to promote equality in terms of access to, and control of, resources.

Finally, in June 2002, FAO reiterated its commitment in this field during the World Food Summit: five years later.

In addition, is it necessary to remind all of Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly, which foresees ensuring an equitable distribution of benefits between men and women in rural areas? This Article underlines the importance of gender equality for sustainable development in rural areas. The majority of FAO member nations signed the Convention and are therefore formally committed to take measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination in regard to women in the area of agriculture, so as to guarantee equal access of men and women to agricultural productive resources, notably land and credit.

Gender equality and the elimination of all kinds of discrimination based on sex are also a means to attain one of the Millennium Development objectives set by the United Nations: to reduce by half the number of people suffering from hunger and the number of the poor by 2015, at the latest. We know that this goal cannot be attained in rural areas where 70% of the poor population live, if we do not take into account access to and control of natural resources and the sharing out of their benefits.

In spite of the abundance of commitments and recommendations, women in rural areas continue to be excluded from decision-making processes and are often forgotten when it comes to political and programme development. The effectiveness, the equality and the sustainability of development strategies and programmes suffer greatly as a result of this.

Indeed, natural resources form the basis and the great majority of the capital for agricultural production promotion in rural areas; access to these resources is regulated by strict social-cultural norms that unfortunately do not always favour women.

In Africa, women, who represent 70 – 80% of the agricultural workforce, have only indirect access to land, which is mainly due to their relations with men (father, brother, son, uncle, husband) who own the land. This situation has a direct impact on what the women cultivate, on the production techniques they use and on what they produce, process and sell.

It is clear that there is a direct link between poverty and security of land access rights. Women's lack of control and access discourages them from making long-term investments on their land as well as from engaging in more promising and long-term projects. This has

repercussions on household and national food security, as women are responsible for the whole food chain which goes from production through to our plates.

All development stakeholders, governments, civil society, researchers and international organisations must be convinced of this fact: agricultural production which depends largely on the work of women can only be increased if the social position of women is assured and their legal status fully recognised.

It must be noted that legal rights do not always guarantee rights. In fact, access to land, whether private or community, is not always a matter of legal rights. As explained by my colleague from the Gender and Development Service of FAO, Ms Zoraida Garcia, a Land Specialist, I quote, “land security depends not only on access, but also on capacity and rights to utilisation, elements often linked to tradition and economy”.

In many African countries, women have the right to inherit and own land, but tradition demands that men determine the use of the land.

Zoraida Garcia goes on to say, “women are not recognized as agriculturalists” and this has repercussions on their access to credit, agricultural inputs, etc. As a result, women are among the poorest on the planet, which is unfair and discriminatory as “the right to land is a human right and both men and women should have equal rights” in this domain.

It is therefore very important to make an assessment of the situation and to establish figures, carry out research and studies. It is necessary to know, and to make known, to inform and raise awareness on legislation and traditions on land issues and their effects on the economic and social progress of the communities. Therein lays the interest of this workshop.

From this perspective, information and communication are essential instruments for rural communities. Information, as the Director General of FAO, Mr. Diouf says, is vital in the fight against hunger. The use of traditional and new information techniques is indispensable and it is through these means and by networking that the Dimitra Project and its Africa partners intend to improve the status of rural women and their communities. This workshop will contribute to this through exchange of experiences, being informed and informing others, debating the problems and trying to find fair solutions for everyone.

One of the first achievements of the workshop is that it has been organised with, and by, rural women themselves. Such is one of the objectives of Dimitra Project: to improve the availability of information on rural women and increase their opportunities to access information. Today, that objective has been met and it is with great satisfaction that, for once, we see that those primarily concerned, rural women, have not only contributed to providing information from the grassroots level for the workshop, but they are also here in large numbers to make their voices heard and give their own visions on their situation.

It is therefore with great enthusiasm that FAO supports this workshop on the access of rural women to land, which starts today, the discussions and recommendations of which already promise to be fascinating and of great use to all of us.

I wish you all fruitful work. I know you will make your voices heard and I can assure you that FAO will disseminate your discussions and conclusions to every level.

Thank you for your attention