

National Rural Women Network of Senegal

International Workshop « Rural Women and Land »

With the support of the FAO-Dimitra project and ENDA PRONAT
Forest Recycling Centre - Thies, 25-27 February 2003, Senegal

Opening Speech of Ms Awa Guèye KEBE, Minister for the Family and National Solidarity

Dear Madam Member of Parliament, Coordinator of the Women's Collective,
Dear Madam Representative of the Commune of Thiès,
Dear Madam Mayor,
Dear FAO Representative,
Dear Madam Regional Director of UNIFEM,
Dear Madam Representative of the Dimitra Project,
Dear Madam Representative of the Belgian Cooperation,
Dear Madam Representative of the Swiss Cooperation,
Dear President of the Board of ENDA,
Dear Madam President of the Rural Women Network,
Dear participants,
Dear leaders of women's organisations,
Dear invitees,

Allow me firstly to welcome our distinguished hosts to Senegal and to express my genuine delight in presiding over the opening of the international workshop on rural women's access to land and to natural resources organised by the National Rural Women Network of Senegal.

In the name of the Head of State, **His Excellency Professor Abdoulaye Wade** and of the Prime Minister, **Mr Idrissa Seck**, I would also like to pass on to rural women across the world and particularly in Africa, my warmest congratulations on this day of reflection, experience exchange and action plan development, to improve conditions for rural women and their families for a better quality of life.

I would also like to take this opportunity to convey the greetings and congratulations of Ms Viviane Wade, wife of the Head of State who gives prime importance to the condition of rural women by working assiduously for the progress of the CDI.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The international workshop "Rural Women and Land" supported by the Dimitra Project/FAO and coordinated by ENDA/PRONAT is of the utmost importance. It provides an excellent opportunity to evaluate initiatives, exchange experiences and reflect on the socio-cultural legal

and regulatory aspects to better manage natural resources in Senegal and in other countries covered by the Dimitra Network.

Eventually, it must enable concrete action strategies to be identified.

As you know, the situation of rural women remains a major preoccupation of governments and development partners in countries which continually develop policies, strategies and actions to improve their condition and their status. They also take into account their practical needs and statistical interests with a view to sustainable fair development, as has been demonstrated since February 1992, with the commitment of the wives of Heads of State and government from Africa, America, Asia and Oceania in their Declaration on Rural Women. In this vein, the Dimitra project was launched in 1994 by the King Baudouin Foundation and FAO.

You will certainly agree with me that many initiatives have been taken over recent years to improve living conditions for rural women. However, there is still much road ahead before we can arrive at equal opportunities and prospects for men and women.

As far as Senegalese women are concerned, their position in society neither reflects their demographic weight (52.5%) nor their actual contribution to the country's development, and rural women are subject to major restrictions.

Therefore, in the area of agriculture, where women are most active (75%), the right to land use reverts to the family, and access to technology, to equipment and to credit is likely to be problematic for her.

Socio-cultural weights still exist in our communities. These can be attributed to the symbolic status of land, but can also be due to current matrimonial rules.

With no access to land, women producers deprived of agricultural inputs and outputs show that the issue of land access is a question of respect.

From now on it is necessary to have a clear political will and a determined large-scale social mobilisation so that rural producers can develop their agricultural activities without restrictions.

This is why the Senegalese government committed itself to improving the status of rural women. Our new constitution, adopted in January, explicitly recognises women's right to land.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This political option spread across different strategy lines, should concentrate on the following aspects, in my opinion:

- improved access to local decision making for rural women;
- increased numbers of female rural councillors;
- a strengthening of their capacities and economic and social empowerment through the National Centre for the Assistance and Training of Women (le Centre National d'Assistance et de Formation des Femmes - CENAF);
- the drawing up of a training plan for new technologies adapted to agricultural use in the local assistance and training centres which will have the goals of providing:
 - o legal information;
 - o health information;

- social and economic information;
- the granting of significant credit so that rural women may improve their working methods and acquire agricultural inputs so as to better profit from the markets.

Hence, our country which aims to reach food self-sufficiency within a short time-span, may find the means to better share productive resources among the population and in particular among its more deprived sections, while at the same time strongly committing itself to stronger support for women producers for the flourishing development of agricultural activities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This workshop focusing on exchange of experiences between representatives of the countries present here and our own is an opportunity to demonstrate the important position of the rural woman, who while held back by various restrictions continues nevertheless to breathe life into family agricultural activities, thus perpetuating ancestral rural traditions.

It is an obligation for the community, through the government, to support rural women in order to guarantee their access to and control over production factors and to involve them in the strategy, planning, implementation and follow-up of local and agricultural development policies.

This dynamic depends on a quality partnership between the different stakeholders to arrive at a situation where women farmers are well-prepared and ready to face the challenges of excellence and globalisation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am still convinced that the relevance and the quality of the experts' messages and exchanges from the different countries, which you are going to be exposed to during this workshop, will help bring to fruition activities already undertaken by rural women to gain access to land property and guarantee food security.

I claim that the creation of an Observatory for the Family in our country that would integrate advocacy and lobbying activities of the population is the essential condition to successfully work in favour of women's promotion (implementation of legal texts).

I cannot finish my speech without thanking, on behalf of all the rural women and in the name of the government, our partners in the front line with women. I can mention FAO and the Dimitra Project which have accepted to accompany the women's march towards a better life and sustainable development.

I would particularly like to thank the National Rural Women Network. In this respect I want to recognise the efforts of ENDA/PRONAT which has gone to great lengths to bring a special spark to this international workshop.

Thank you also to **Ms Tiné NDOYE** for her dynamism and her relevance. I'm not forgetting **Ms Fatou Sow** for her support to the success of this workshop.

On this note, I proclaim the international workshop "**Rural Women and Land**" officially open

Thank you for your kind attention