



منظمة الأغذية
والزراعة
للأمم المتحدة

联合国
粮食及
农业组织

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Продовольственная и
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Organización
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Unidas
para la
Agricultura
y la
Alimentación

EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURE (ECA)

THIRTEENTH (SPECIAL) SESSION OF THE WORKING PARTY ON WOMEN AND THE FAMILY IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rome, Italy, 15 April 2009

ORGANIZATION OF WPW ACTIVITIES AND COMMUNICATION

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I. OBJECTIVES AND ORGANIZATION OF THE WPW

1. The Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development (WPW) is a subsidiary body of the FAO European Commission on Agriculture (ECA), established in 1965. It is the only FAO statutory body in the European region which specifically addresses gender issues. Its principal strength is its organization as a broad network with a multidisciplinary approach, representing a range of professions, institutions and organizations with capacity-building as the key component.

2. The overall objective of the WPW is to assist FAO member governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) to undertake joint actions and cooperate in gender and development projects as well as encourage and facilitate cooperation between international governmental and non-governmental organizations concerned with this topic, and to make recommendations on all matters within its geographical competence. Specific WPW activities include:

- Exchange of information and experience with a view to promoting the role of women and the family in agriculture and rural development;
- Promotion of the professional development of rural women;
- Cooperation with institutions and agencies striving for the integration of women in rural development, and
- Formulation of policy recommendations on matters pertaining to education, research, extension, training and other related fields within their areas of technical competence.

3. The WPW, being a subsidiary body of the ECA, reports to the Commission and the ECA Rules of Procedure apply *mutatis mutandis* to the WPW. The Board of the Working Party, composed of representatives of up to seven Member States, including a Chairman and two Vice-Chairmen (elected at regular sessions), expedites follow-up activities and acts as an advisory committee between sessions. The Board meets once-twice a year and - in cooperation with and assisted since 2005 by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) that services the WPW - develops a plan of activities for a given biennium that includes workshops, WPW sessions, seminars, inputs and participation in projects, studies and technical consultations.

4. The WPW biennial sessions provide a forum for making policy recommendations and decisions, evaluating existing activities and determining the future orientation of the WPW. The themes for sessions are put forward by participants and relate to the priority needs of Member States (Annex 1 lists the main technical themes addressed). The principal WPW activities in recent years have been the annual Expert Meetings (EMs) that focus on training techniques, methodologies, and the acquisition of information and skills that are useful for stakeholders working in the rural development sector. The meetings also serve as a platform for discussion and sharing of information and experiences between participants and countries – both during and after the meetings.

5. The WPW promotes gender equality and women's empowerment under Millennium Development Goal 3, as essential to reducing poverty and improving rural livelihoods. The WPW has been particularly successful in providing a forum or focal point for meetings for rural women, researchers, practitioners and policymakers involved in rural development, and has led to greater sensitivity and awareness of issues pertaining to rural women. The series of WPW Expert Meetings (EMs) provide a forum for the review of technical matters of particular concern and training as well as study tours to rural areas to present rural development issues that may reduce poverty, but may be difficult to quantify, e.g. overcoming lack of confidence and feeling of disempowerment, in addition to vocational and professional training. With regard to networking, the objectives of the WPW have only partially been achieved and its intensity of networking has significantly decreased over the last years.

6. The WPW, as an advisory FAO body, will continue to work on issues pertinent to sustainable rural development along the lines of the long-term priorities endorsed by the 26th Regional Conference for Europe and FAO's Gender and Development Plan of Action (GAD PoA) for 2008-2013. For a summary list of thematic areas recently covered by WPW activities, see Annex I.

II. STATUS OF THE ECA WPW REVIEWED DURING THE 34TH AND 35TH ECA SESSIONS

7. The function of Secretary to the WPW was provided by the outposted Gender and Development Officer, Regional Office for Europe (REU), until December 2004, when the post was abolished as a consequence of budgetary constraints faced by the Organization. The 33rd Session of the ECA was informed that it was necessary to scale down technical support to the WPW by the Gender and Population Division (SDW) in view of budgetary constraints. In 2006, the ECA Executive Committee submitted the following options for consideration by the 34th Session of the ECA ¹:

- a) to recommend to the FAO Council the abolition of the WPW in December 2007 or when funds in the Trust Fund GCP/RER/018/MUL were extinguished;
- b) to maintain the WPW as a subsidiary body of the ECA on condition that extra-budgetary support from interested donors was ensured.

8. It was proposed that should the ECA endorse option (a), the Executive Committee would ensure that an item on gender-related issues would become a standing item of ECA future sessions. Further, if the ECA should endorse option (b), the Executive Committee recommended that it be mandated to undertake an assessment of the objectives of the WPW and its methods of work. The Executive Committee was to report its findings to the 35th Session of the ECA. In the interim period and considering the limited resources available in Trust Fund GCP/RER/018/MUL, Support to the activities of the FAO-ECA Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development, the Executive Committee recommended that the WPW activities should adhere to the objectives of project GCP/RER/018/MUL, i.e. to organize the yearly thematic EM and to facilitate exchange of information on gender issues through networking.

9. The status of the Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development (WPW) was further discussed during the Thirty-fifth Session of the FAO European Commission on Agriculture that took place on 25 June 2008 in Innsbruck. The Commission in its report (ECA/08/REP refers) recognized that the WPW is an important forum, being the only FAO statutory body addressing gender issues in the Region and emphasized the important commitments undertaken by FAO as part of the United Nations System to mainstream gender into projects and policies.

10. The Commission supported the continuation of the WPW activities, based on (i) allocated Regular Programme resources for the 2008-2009 biennium, (ii) operational multi-donor trust fund GCP/RER/018/MUL Support to the activities of the FAO-ECA Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development and noted (iii) the availability of a Junior Technical Officer: Rural Development and Gender, financed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of Hungary, expressing the view that these resources would contribute to the revival and expansion of the WPW activities.

¹ ECA 35/08/4 Status of the ECA Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development paras 14 and 15 refer.

11. Some Member States supported the proposal to focus the WPW Sessions and Expert Meetings on selected priority areas and, specifically, to shorten their duration. The Commission welcomed the possibility of enhancing communication by approaching institutions and ministries beyond the Ministry of Agriculture. Member States underlined the importance of FAO's involvement in gender focused rural development projects and activities in the Central and Eastern European subregion and requested the expansion towards Central Asian countries. The Commission requested the Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development to take advantage of the introduction of the Russian language as one of the official languages of FAO since this would open up further opportunities for many people.

12. The Commission endorsed (para 28 of ECA/08/REP refers) the recommendation of the ECA Chairperson that a special ECA WPW meeting should be convened by the end of 2008 in Rome to review and make recommendations on WPW matters recognizing the importance of gender issues in agricultural and rural areas in the European Region. This meeting was to be organized by the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia in order to review the form and organization of the Working Party on Women and propose measures for improvements, including better communication between the WPW, the ECA and the WPW Secretariat in the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. The requested information was provided to the Executive Committee during a meeting at FAO Headquarters on 25 November 2008. The present 13th (Special) Session is intended to reply to that ECA request.

III. NEW APPROACHES TO ECA WPW ACTIVITIES

A. CONSISTENCY OF THE WPW THEMES AND ACTIVITIES WITH THE UNITED NATIONS GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN OF ACTION AND FAO GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN OF ACTION 2008-2013

13. Future activities of the WPW will aim at a close uniformity with the FAO Gender and Development Plan of Action (GAD PoA) 2008-2013. The intention of the WPW to work within the long-term priorities endorsed by the previous FAO GAD PoA 2002-2007 was affirmed at the WPW 2002 Session. Thus WPW future activities should contribute to the achievement of the four objectives identified in the GAD PoA:

- Promote gender equality in the access to sufficient, safe and nutritionally adequate food (food and nutrition);
- Promote gender equality in the access to, control over and management of natural resources, and agricultural support services (natural resources);
- Promote gender equality in policy- and decision-making processes at all levels in the agricultural and rural sector (policy and planning), and
- Promote gender equality in opportunities for on- and off-farm employment in rural areas (rural economies, labour and livelihoods).

B. EXPERT MEETINGS AGENDA AND PARTICIPATION

14. Efforts would concentrate on the improvement of EM agendas and participation, since they have been assessed, by the different stakeholders, to be the most useful WPW activity in terms of relevance of topics and experience sharing. It is envisaged that improvement in the performance of EMs could be achieved through the following actions ²:

² For summary, see ECA 35/08/4 Status of the ECA Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development, paras 23 through 28 refer.

- Shortening and at the same time intensifying the programme;
- More focused technical presentations, with comprehensive peer review as part of EM preparations;
- Identifying and inviting specific target groups of participants from the CEE and Central Asia subregions, while countries more advanced in reforms and rural development with relevant experience would be invited to present and share experience, and
- Training sessions would aim to transfer knowledge and practical tools to beneficiaries on how women's empowerment can be increased; empowerment practices should be aligned to the particular topic of the EM.

15. It is proposed to revitalize networking and knowledge-sharing through development of the WPW website with past WPW reports and presentations; the website would also present available best practices, experience and a contact data base. Pending availability of resources, publication of an irregular newsletter on gender and rural development with ESW support could be considered (for ECA, WPW Board decision).

C. COOPERATION AND COMMUNICATION WITH GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS AND NGOS/CSOS

16. A basic problem faced by the WPW, including the EMs has been the low response by Ministries of Agriculture to invitations to events and activities related to gender and rural women entrepreneurs. It is noted that for a number of Ministries of Agriculture in the CEE and Central Asia subregions, both rural development and gender issues remain a secondary priority. Ministries often lack comprehensive information on the importance and relevance of gender issues, lack experience and expertise, for example, on gender aspects of land reforms or reforms of the farmers' social security systems and on the actual and potential discrimination of women.

17. In order to remedy this, the REU/Subregional Office for Central and Eastern Europe (SEU) Secretariat has undertaken and will continue to expand the contact base for WPW activities to other Ministries and Government agencies that address issues related to minorities and women but, on the other hand, do not always view rural areas and populations as their potential target group.

18. REU/SEU, pending the availability of resources, provide Russian interpretation to WPW EMs in order to facilitate the participation of CEE and Central Asia specialists.

19. Pending guidance from the Executive Committee and in line with FAO policy to involve and support participation of NGOs in FAO statutory and core activities and depending on availability of resources, REU and SEU in close collaboration with the FAO Subregional Office for Central Asia (SEC), will consider supporting the participation of NGOs from CIS countries in the WPW Session and Expert Meeting in 2009 in view of the need to promote gender issues in this group of countries.

ANNEX 1

**TABLE 1: SELECTED TECHNICAL THEMES COVERED BY THE WPW
BETWEEN 1990 AND 2008**

Regular biennial sessions

Technical Theme	Year
Socio-economic factors in rural development – Implications for women	1990
Rural development through entrepreneurship and village renewal	1991
People's participation in the development of rural areas through community building	1992
The role of partnership and networking in rural development – How can women be involved	1992
Rural and agro-tourism development in Europe	1992
Management and implementation of rural development projects	1993
The family as the basic socio-economic unit in sustainable rural development	1994
Socio-economic situation and status of rural women in selected Central and Eastern European countries	1994
Training of rural women in entrepreneurship and small business development	1994
Nutrition as a factor in family well-being	1994
Women and youth in rural development	1994
Research on rural women and youth	1994
Challenges and opportunities for youth in rural areas	2000
Alternative initiatives for rural development	2001
Planning, monitoring and evaluation of rural development programmes and projects with a view to integration of gender and participatory dimensions	2002
Food safety and quality	2004
Institutional capacity-building for rural women's empowerment	2004
Transborder networking: An approach for a participatory and gender-sensitive rural development	2004

Expert Meetings

Technical Theme	Year
Sustainable rural tourism: a gender and community perspective	2005
Rural development through diversification of jobs and incomes. Focus on gender-responsive microfinance.	2006
Rural development policies and programmes to generate jobs and incomes. Gender Focus: from product and services development to marketing. Lessons learned during European integration and market transition	2007
Rural development policies and programmes to generate jobs and incomes. Out of the Shadows: Making female labour in agriculture visible	2008

