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REPORT ON ACTIVITIES OF THE ECA WORKING PARTY ON WOMEN AND THE FAMILY IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT (WPW)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development (WPW) was established by the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA) at its 14th Session in 1965 (Resolution ECA 8/65). It is open to members of all ECA Member States. The purpose of the WPW is to:

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

2. The WPW is the only FAO statutory body in the European Region which addresses specific gender issues, thus providing a link between Member Nations, the Regional Office for Europe and the Gender and Development Service (SD Department). One of its strengths is its organization as a broad network with a multidisciplinary approach representing a range of professions, institutions and organisations in which capacity building is the key element. It creates a unique platform in the FAO European Region for the exchange of knowledge and experiences focussing on gender and rural development issues.

3. Response from Member Nations shows that the WPW has contributed to place gender issues on the agenda of the countries in the Region, to address the needs of rural men and women in relevant policies, programmes and projects and has been successful in establishing new forms of cooperation and networking between the institutional and grass-roots levels in the Member Nations. The WPW has been particularly successful in providing a forum or focal point for meetings for rural women, researchers, practitioners and policy-makers involved in rural

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development in the European Region and its working approach has led to greater sensitivity and awareness of issues pertinent to rural women.

4. The WPW views networking as an instrument that facilitates the process of exchange and learning that will bring the status and importance of rural woman to the attention of decision-makers and contribute to achieving equity in work and living opportunities.

II. Planning for the Future

5. In planning future activities, FAO, the ECA and the WPW, need to make every effort to mainstream gender into agriculture and rural development and, in particular, into areas that call for immediate attention; i.e. issues of food safety and quality, women's and men's equal and active participation in agriculture and rural development programmes and projects, equal access to decision-making, education, resources and services and information, equal employment benefits from agriculture and rural development for both men and women.

6. In order to increase awareness of the role rural women play in and their contribution to food safety and quality, one of the major items of the forthcoming 24th Regional Conference for Europe, to be held in France in May 2004, the WPW has prepared a document to address issues of food safety and quality in Europe from a gender perspective.

7. The WPW, as an advisory FAO body, will continue to work on issues pertinent to sustainable rural development, including those involving food safety and quality in the Region, following the strategy presented at the last ECA Session in March 2002. The strategy developed, among others, along the lines of the long-term priorities endorsed by the 22nd Regional Conference for Europe¹ and FAO's Gender and Development Plan of Action (GAD PoA) for 2002-2007², provides a framework for assisting member countries as follows:

- provide support to the formulation of gender-sensitive rural development policies, including diversification of rural activities and generation of alternative income, local and national capacity-building and institutions' strengthening, with special attention to gender issues;
- provide support to the development of gender-sensitive policies for effective land administration and management to facilitate rural development;
- promote regional cooperation in the collection, dissemination and use of gender-disaggregated data (quantitative and qualitative) and information for policy planning, and in the use of the Socioeconomic and Gender Analysis (SEAGA) methodology and its adaptation to the national context;
- provide support to the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national action plans to promote gender mainstreaming in institutions and development programmes and projects;
- monitor processes such as the ageing of the population, the age-related feminization of agricultural activities and out migration of youth and its impact on food safety and quality issues; and,

¹ The priorities identified were:

- Poverty reduction through support to sustainable rural livelihoods and food security;
- Food safety and quality;
- Sustainable management of natural resources;
- Institution and capacity building to support the process of transition to market economies in the rural sector.

² The objectives of FAO GAD PoA are to promote gender equality in:

- Access to sufficient, safe and nutritionally adequate food;
- Access to control over and management of natural resources, and agricultural support services;
- Participation in policy and decision-making processes at all levels in the agricultural and rural sector; and
- Opportunities for on and off-farm employment in rural areas.

- provide support to strengthen the capacities of rural public institutions, private sector and civil society organizations at all levels to devise and implement gender-sensitive policies and strategies that improve the quality of life of rural populations.
8. ECA's further support to the above strategy will help to empower rural women to overcome the existing gender inequalities at household and community level as well as in society in general, and face the challenges of new initiatives in rural areas, resulting in new forms of pluriactivity, means and measures to protect nature and the landscape, increase food supplies, strengthen measures on food safety and quality, and face other newly emerging social issues.
9. The planning of the WPW's future activities will take into consideration and follow closely the strategies and work programmes adopted for the implementation of the GAD PoA in Europe and the GAD/WID programme in the FAO European Region. This will contribute to a more efficient pursuance of the goal of the advancement of rural women, will provide an increased visibility of the WPW and ensure a higher level of coherence as activities will be linked together and reinforced in working towards a common goal.

III. Review of the Main WPW Activities in the 2002-2003 Biennium

10. This section provides a detailed report on the activities undertaken by the WPW during the 2002-2003 biennium. Main events included the 11th Session of the FAO/ECA WPW held in Switzerland (October 2002) and the 15th and 16th FAO/ECA Expert Meetings on Gender and Rural Development, held respectively in Finland (2002) and Lithuania (2003).
11. The FAO/ECA WPW Expert Meetings, previously known as summer schools, are regarded as one of the most important and influential activities of WPW. They are organized annually, jointly with a Member Nation. Expert Meetings focus on training techniques, methodologies and the acquisition of the information and skills necessary for those working in the rural development process. Themes of the meetings in the past ranged from management of rural development projects, local communities' participation in rural development, small business and rural tourism development, entrepreneurship, development of alliances, partnerships and networks, to communication techniques and information technology, socio-economic and gender analyses and mainstreaming gender into development programmes and projects.
12. The WPW sessions are held biannually. They provide a forum for making policy decisions, evaluating existing activities and determining future recommendations pertinent to the advancement of rural women in the European Region.
13. The 11th Session of the WPW was again an occasion to identify priority needs based on technical inputs to the session and participants' discussions on pertinent aspects of gender-related issues, and to move ahead in the process of formulating recommendations relevant to future development. The WPW sessions, thus provide a forum for policy-making decisions for the development of the WPW activities, evaluating the existing activities and determining future orientation. The last session, for example, called on the WPW to play a role in shaping policies resulting in programmes targeted at rural and farm women.
14. As with the expert meetings, the participants found sessions to be very useful exercises, providing a unique opportunity to learn from each other and focus on relevant and emerging gender-related issues.

The Eleventh Session of the WPW, Switzerland, 14 - 17 October 2002

15. The Eleventh Session of the WPW³ was held in Fribourg from 14 to 17 October 2002 at the kind invitation of the Government of Switzerland. The theme of the Session was “The Role of Women in Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development”. The Session was attended by 25 participants representing 15 countries (8 western European and 6 CEE and CIS countries), 2 organizations with observer status and FAO.

- a) The Session acknowledged the ripple effect of the activities of the WPW, resulting in regional and subregional workshops, seminars, dissemination of methodologies and international exchanges of experiences and recommended that in future the WPW addresses in particular: raising political awareness and interest among rural women and increasing their capacity for participation in decision-making, and improving opportunities for education and training for rural women and young people;
- b) recommended that the ECA should rethink the support scheme to the WPW;
- c) stressed that it was essential to turn gender awareness into gender action;
- d) noted the diversified and multiple roles women play in agriculture and sustainable rural development;
- e) noted that gender relations should be seen in a wider socio-economic context of continuing change in agriculture and rural development and noted the need for improvement of infrastructures to enable women to participate actively in the changing socio-economic context;
- f) stressed the need to promote networking among rural women and rural women’s organizations as such networks are essential in lobbying for rural women’s interests and rural issues in general;
- g) noted the need for comparable gender sensitive statistics, data collection and analysis throughout the Region;
- h) noted the need to revise and harmonize gender terminology.

The 15th FAO/ECA WPW Expert Meeting on Gender and Rural Development, Finland, 10-14 June, 2002

16. The 15th FAO/ECA WPW Expert Meeting on Gender and Rural Development was held in Mikkeli, Finland, from 10 to 14 June 2002. The theme of the Expert Meeting was “Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation of Rural Development Programmes and Projects with a View to Integration of Gender and Participatory Dimensions”. The objectives were aimed at assisting participants to improve their capacity in the use of tools and methodologies for planning, monitoring and evaluating rural development programmes and projects, in particular regarding integration of gender and participatory dimensions, to exchange experiences and to learn from the best and/or worst practices in the FAO European Region and draft proposals to assist countries to mainstream a gender and participatory dimension into rural development policies, programmes and projects. The Meeting was organized jointly by the FAO Regional Office for Europe, the Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and the Mikkeli Institute for Rural Research and Training of the University of Helsinki. In total, 25 participants representing 15 countries attended.

³ Since 1980, eleven WPW sessions have been held. The theme of the sessions is chosen by the WPW from suggestions by participants in various WPW activities, and relates to the priority needs of Member Nations. The past few sessions, for example, addressed themes such as: the environmental concepts for rural development (1996), challenges facing rural women with a view to their participation in decision-making process (1998) and challenges and opportunities for youth in rural areas (2000).

*16th FAO/ECA WPW Expert Meeting on Gender and Rural Development,
Lithuania, 8-12 September, 2003*

17. The 16th FAO/ECA WPW Expert Meeting on Gender and Rural Development took place at Birštonas, Lithuania from 8 to 12 September 2003. The theme of the Expert Meeting was “Community Mobilization and Motivation for Participation in Rural Development”. It was organized jointly by the FAO Regional Office for Europe, the Lithuanian Ministry of Agriculture, the Chamber of Agriculture and the Lithuanian Farm Women’s Association. The objectives of the meeting were to inform participants regarding the use of different tools and methodologies to motivate and mobilize local communities, to exchange information and experiences, and to draft action plans to assist participants to mainstream a gender and participatory dimension into top-down and bottom-up interventions for rural development. In total, 23 participants representing 14 countries attended.

IV. Workplan for 2004-2005

18. The strategy of the WPW (until 2007) intends to address, within the above-mentioned context, the specific and common needs and problems of rural women in the different sub-regions of Europe as specified at the last WPW sessions (Austria, 2000 and Switzerland, 2002), at the international expert meetings (Finland 2002 and Lithuania 2003) and other meetings, workshops and seminars in which WPW has participated.

19. Proposed future major activities include:

- 12th WPW Session (Slovakia has been identified as a possible host country, October 2004);
- 17th WPW Expert Meeting on Gender and Rural Development (Austria, June 2004);
- International Workshop on Gender-disaggregated Data (Norway has been identified as a possible host country, September 2004).
- WPW Board Meeting, 1st week of February 2005 (tentative date), FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy;
- WPW Board Meeting, 1st week of November 2005 (tentative date), FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy;
- 18th Expert Meeting on Gender and Rural Development (country to be determined, June 2005);
- 13th WPW Session (country to be determined, early 2006, prior to the ECA Session);

20. WPW will address some activities focussing on rural food safety and quality issues from a gender perspective (e.g. meeting of researchers) depending on funding availability.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

21. The FAO/ECA WPW, at its 11th Session, issued the following statement on emerging issues concerning the role of women in sustainable agriculture and rural development:

“The ECA Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development is aware of the crucial impacts globalization is having on rural areas, in particular with a view to ensuring sustainability of future development. To guarantee the sustainability of rural areas, a multifunctional agriculture and diversified rural economy are needed. The full involvement of rural women in the development processes is essential.

Women’s contribution and the multiple roles they play in agriculture and the rural sector must be economically and socially recognized. It is vital to adapt the institutional frameworks to enable rural women to take a more active part in decision-making processes.

Women’s active participation in rural development will enable them to take the necessary actions to meet their interests and needs, which will benefit the entire rural society. In the future it

is vital for rural areas that public and private institutions and organizations, together with women's networks, lobby for their interests in political arenas.

The implications of social and economic restructuring in rural areas and on farms for both women and men need to be further investigated. It is important to give a higher priority to rural development policies and to approach them from a long term perspective to enhance the generation of job and income opportunities for both rural women and men."

22. To facilitate the attainment of the above-mentioned objectives it is essential to go beyond "gender awareness" and translate it into "gender action". In order to reach this goal, the WPW has elaborated the following recommendations for the attention of the ECA and the forthcoming 24th Regional Conference for Europe:

- strengthening gender mainstreaming in rural issues through gender budgeting and capacity-building in Member Nations, all international bodies and in documents and surveys with the aim of providing equal opportunities for rural women and men;
- developing gender-sensitive legislation that will ensure equitable access to resources such as education and training, land and credit;
- increasing rural women's participation in decision-making processes, at all levels, to ensure at least a 40 percent representation of women;
- promoting development of a quantitative and qualitative database on rural and farm women and its analysis for a better recognition of women's vital social and economic contribution to rural society, and in order to develop more gender-sensitive rural development and agricultural policies;
- developing gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation of agriculture and rural development programmes to ensure a better involvement of rural women in rural development processes;
- supporting NGOs and networks that pursue the advancement of rural women in order to facilitate an exchange of experiences which will promote a multiple effect;
- fostering cooperation between countries in the Region for the exchange of knowledge on gender and rural development issues;
- elaborating guidelines for the preparation of national action plans for mainstreaming gender in agricultural and rural development.

23. Furthermore, the WPW strongly supports the Plan of Action of the World Food Summit (WFS, 1996)⁴ to ensure gender equality and empowerment of women.

24. The WPW also supports the “Message from Rome to Johannesburg” a political declaration promoting equality among men and women stemming from the side event on rural women organized within the framework of the WFS: fyl. The declaration in particular highlights the following:

- the need to enhance the status of rural women and promote gender equality in agriculture and rural development through action in two key areas: (i) the equal access to and control of natural and productive resources; and (ii) the empowerment and full participation of rural women as agents for change in policy making at all levels and throughout development activities;
- the importance of developing legislative frameworks, policies and strategies that create an enabling environment for the empowerment and advancement of rural women, including training and access to production-related services;
- the requirement to reiterate the commitment for the creation and reinforcement of information networks and communication channels amongst rural women and between rural women and government planning institutions. These networks can facilitate the collection, recording and dissemination of good examples and practices in gender sensitive and sustainable agricultural and rural development, which can serve as models for other undertakings;
- the fact that local institutions (formal and informal) that women have created to manage resources for livelihoods should be recognized and supported in development actions that enhance food production, biodiversity and quality.

25. The WPW requests ECA’s full support for the implementation of the above-mentioned measures in the European Region and for the WPW’s Workplan, developed together with REU, for the next biennium. The Workplan intends to address the above-mentioned recommendations through the future planned activities, within the funding available and with the appropriate organizational support of REU.

⁴ Extract from the World Food Summit Plan of Action, 1996:

Commitment One

- Ensure an enabling political, social, and economic environment designed to create the best conditions for the eradication of poverty and for durable peace, based on full and equal participation of women and men, which is most conducive to achieving sustainable food security for all.

Objective 1.3: To ensure gender equality and empowerment of women. To this end, governments will:

- Support and implement commitments made at the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995, that a gender perspective is mainstreamed in all policies;
- Promote women’s full and equal participation in the economy, and for this purpose, introduce and enforce gender-sensitive legislation providing women with secure and equal access to and control over productive resources, including credit, land and water;
- Ensure that institutions provide equal access for women;
- Provide equal gender opportunities for education and training in food production, processing and marketing;
- Tailor extension and technical services to women producers and increase the number of women advisors and agents;
- Improve the collection, dissemination and use of gender-disaggregated data in agriculture, fisheries, forestry and rural development;
- Focus research efforts on the division of labour and on income access and control within the household;
- Gather information on women’s traditional knowledge and skills in agriculture, fisheries, forestry and natural resource management.

26. In conclusion, the WPW's framework and Workplan aim to strengthen the involvement of rural women and their families in the priority areas defined by the Regional Conference for Europe which will, in turn, benefit the development of rural areas throughout the European Region.