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EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURE (ECA)

Thirty-fourth Session

Riga, Latvia, 7 June 2006

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

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

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). Being a subsidiary body of the ECA, the WPW reports to the ECA and the Rules of Procedure of the ECA apply *mutatis mutandis* to the WPW. It is open to all ECA Member Nations. The Board of the Working Party, composed of representatives of seven Member Nations (elected at sessions), expedites follow-up activities and acts as an Advisory Committee between sessions. 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 organizes annual Expert Meetings that provide participants with opportunities to strengthen their capacity to analyse and address gender-linked challenges for rural development. At the same time, the Expert Meeting serves as a forum for exchange of learning and experiences between countries. The WPW also organizes biennial sessions at which the WPW reports on past activities. Additionally, session participants present and discuss current and emerging issues, and provide recommendations for actions to improve gender equality in rural Europe.

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3. Participation by Member Nations in WPW sessions has substantially decreased in the past decade¹. The Secretariat for 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 by the representative of the Gender and Population Division (SDW) that, in view of budgetary constraints and the abolition of the Gender and Development Officer post in REU, it was therefore necessary to dramatically scale down its technical support to the WPW.

4. Activities of the WPW in 2005 were mainly carried out by the WPW Board². A brief report of activities carried out in 2004-05 is given in the Annex to this document.

5. In an effort to ensure the continuation of WPW activities, at least until December 2007, extrabudgetary funds amounting to US\$52 900 were transferred to FAO in December 2005 by four donors (Austria, Lithuania, Norway and Switzerland) in support of WPW activities for the next two to three years, and a Multilateral Trust Fund project (GCP/RER/018/MUL) has been established. The project's immediate objectives are : (i) build capacity to mainstream and analyse gender-specific needs in agriculture and rural development work through the organization of expert meetings and workshops; and (ii) facilitate the exchange of information, knowledge and experiences related to gender issues, agriculture and rural development in the Region.

II. CURRENT STATUS

6. The Organization is experiencing two consecutive biennia of real reduction in resources which has resulted in an adjustment in the programme of work. An Independent External Evaluation of FAO (IEE) will be undertaken, the findings and recommendations of which will be examined by the Council and ultimately the Conference in 2007. An in-depth assessment of the objectives and format of the Regional Conference for Europe and of the ECA itself was carried out by the ECA Executive Committee in 2004 and 2005, as mandated by the 24th FAO Regional Conference.

7. Despite the importance of gender related issues in the Region, the limited human and financial resources available are a matter of concern. Pending the results of the IEE and within the context of efficiency savings advocated by the Governing Bodies of the Organization, the Executive Committee submits the following options for consideration by the 34th Session of the ECA:

- (i) recommend to the FAO Council the abolition of the WPW in December 2007 or when funds in GCP/RER/018/MUL are extinguished;
- (ii) maintain the WPW as a subsidiary body of the ECA on condition that extrabudgetary support from interested donors is ensured.

8. Should the ECA endorse option (i), the Executive Committee would ensure that an item on gender related issues become a standing item of the ECA's future sessions.

9. Should the ECA endorse option (ii), the Executive Committee recommends that it be mandated to undertake an assessment of the objectives of the WPW and its methods of work. The Executive Committee would report its findings to the 35th Session of the ECA. In the interim period and considering the limited resources available in GCP/RER/018/MUL, the Executive

¹ Rule IV.7 of the Rules of Procedure of the ECA reads: "A majority of the Representatives shall constitute a quorum".

² The Board is currently composed of: Ms Celia Fernández Fontanillas (Spain) as Chairperson; Ms Wendy Peter-Hodel (Switzerland) as Vice-Chairperson; and Ms Theresia Oedl-Wieser (Austria); Ms Egle Daunoriene (Lithuania); Ms Ingunn Sornes (Norway); Ms Janina Sawicka (Poland) and Ms Liisa Niilola (Finland) as members (paras. 72-74 of the Report of the 12th Session of the WPW refer) with support provided by the Sub-Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe (SEUR) and REU and limited technical support by SDW.

Committee recommends that the activities of WPW should adhere to the objectives of project GCP/RER/018/MUL, i.e. organize the yearly thematic expert meeting and facilitate exchange of information on gender issues through networking. In addition, technical assistance to WPW should also be covered through extra-budgetary resources.

WPW ACTIVITIES IN THE 2004-2005 BIENNIUM

ANNEX**WPW BOARD MEETINGS**

1. The activities of the WPW for this biennium were planned on the basis of the recommendations of the previous Session. During the period two Board Meetings were held.

WPW EXPERT MEETINGS ON GENDER AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

2. The WPW Expert Meetings are organized annually, jointly with a Member Nation. Expert Meetings focus on methodologies 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. Themes of past meetings include: project management, community participation, small business development, entrepreneurship, communication techniques and information technology, and socio-economic and gender analysis.

**17TH WPW EXPERT MEETING ON GENDER AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT,
SALZBURG, AUSTRIA, 14-18 JUNE 2004**

3. The theme of the meeting was “Transborder Networking: An Approach for a Participatory and Gender Sensitive Rural Development”. The meeting was attended by 26 participants from 14 different countries.
4. The expert meeting allowed participants to:
 - exchange practical experiences and learn from best practices across the European region;
 - use different methodologies, tools and approaches for networking and partnership building (i.e. how to reach new partners);
 - identify and clarify the concepts and terminology relevant to the theme;
 - develop follow-up activities to strengthen the transborder cooperation among the Member States on Rural Development projects.

**18TH WPW EXPERT MEETING ON GENDER AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT,
KRAKOW, POLAND, 5-9 SEPTEMBER 2005**

5. The theme was “Sustainable Rural Tourism: A Gender and Community Perspective”. The meeting was attended by 43 participants (18 from the host country) representing 14 countries. The Central European Initiative (CEI) provided support to representatives from Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania to participate in the meeting. The objectives of the meeting were to identify and discuss opportunities and constraints for the development of the rural tourism sector in a gender-responsive manner, as well as to learn from presentations and country case studies and experiences.

TWELFTH SESSION OF THE WPW, SLOVAKIA, 18 - 21 OCTOBER 2004

6. The Twelfth Session of the WPW³ was held in Nitra from 18 to 21 October 2004 at the kind invitation of the Government of Slovakia. The theme of the Session was “Institutional Capacity Building for Rural Women’s Empowerment”. The Session was attended by participants representing nine Member Nations in the Region. The report of the Session is available at the following website: <http://www.fao.org/regional/Europe> (under meetings). The Session in particular endorsed the following “Statement on emerging issues concerning capacity building for rural women’s empowerment” (paras. 60 to 66 of the Report of the session refer).

- Women’s empowerment should be seen as a process throughout which women get an understanding of how gender relations influence their lives and perhaps even more important, gain and strengthen their capacities, rights and opportunities to “challenge” existing patterns.
- Capacity building aims at regional women’s empowerment needs to be built into different spheres of life and at different (interrelated) levels. It is crucial that capacity building encompasses both changing the institutional (‘rules of the game’) as well as the organizational (material forms) dimensions.
- To reach equality in society and empowerment of rural women in respect of institutional capacity building, it is fundamental to overcome the fixed gender roles in all spheres of our society.
- Gender equality is a basic human right which also has significance as an economic issue and should be taken into consideration in the current rural, regional and other relevant policy discourses.
- Empowering women must not be a policy on its own, but should be included in all policies, including agricultural and rural development policies.
- Agricultural and rural policies should open to more diverse strategies by including women’s knowledge and experiences in designing the policies in order to build a strong agriculture and viable rural communities.
- It is essential to turn “gender awareness” into “gender actions”.

7. The Session noted that the structures to support the WPW were still in place, and urged that activities must continue (paras 7, 23, 24 and 55 of the Report to the Session refers). Session participants agreed to discuss future funding opportunities with their respective countries.

WPW SURVEY 2004

8. A WPW Survey 2004 was carried out which demonstrates that WPW facilitates the exchange of information, knowledge and experiences related to gender issues, agriculture and rural development in the Region.

³ Since 1980, twelve WPW sessions have been held. The theme of the sessions is chosen by the WPW from suggestions by participants in various WPW activities. The past few sessions, for example, addressed themes such as: challenges facing rural women with a view to their participation in the decision-making process (1998), challenges and opportunities for youth in rural areas (2000), and the Role of Women in Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (2002).

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

9. Within the limited funds available in project GCP/RER/018/MUL, the WPW Board underlines that future activities of the WPW should be carried out in the context of FAO's Gender and Development Plan of Action (GAD PoA) and should focus on:

- providing support for 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;
- providing support to the development of gender-sensitive policies for effective land administration and management to facilitate rural development;
- promoting regional cooperation in the collection, dissemination and use of gender-disaggregated data and information for policy planning, and in the use of the Socioeconomic and Gender Analysis (SEAGA) methodology and its adaptation to the national context;
- providing support for the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national action plans to promote gender mainstreaming in institutions and development programmes and projects;
- monitoring processes such as the ageing of the population, the age-related feminization of agricultural activities and outmigration of youth and its impact on food safety and quality issues; and
- providing 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.

10. In addition, the WPW Board underlines that the WPW will:

- Continue to offer member countries a platform for training and exchange of experience on gender analysis and gender mainstreaming in agriculture and rural development;
- Enhance efforts to increase participation from non-EU European countries (in particular Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and the Western Balkans);
- Strengthen emphasis on information sharing in order to disseminate material to specialists and institutions, including occasional newsletters;
- Explore potential for partnerships for joint activities in the CEE and CIS sub-region, e.g. with UNDP, the CEI (Central European Initiative) and non-governmental organizations;
- Link WPW activities with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially MDG 1 on poverty eradication and MDG 3 on promoting gender equality.