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

1. The Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development (WPW) was established in 1965 by the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA) and is open to all Member Nations of the ECA. The FAO Regional Office for Europe (REU) services the WPW. The WPW “assists FAO Member Governments 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”. 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 the 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 present document constitutes the WPW Report to the 32nd ECA Session (Rome, March 2002). It was prepared jointly by WPW and REU, based on discussions held at the Board's informal meeting of 3-4 December 2001, in Rome.

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I. Introduction: a Gender Perspective on Rural Development

3. It has always been an objective of the Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development (WPW) to address, through its work and activities, pertinent and emerging development issues in the European rural areas. Rural Europe has been and is still profoundly affected by the globalisation process, the expansion of the European Union, and the transition processes in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). This and the new policies concerning environment, social security and equal opportunities are triggering economic, social and environmental adjustments in rural areas that are deeply affecting the identities as well as working and living conditions of rural people. For example, there are significant contrasts between agro-industrial enterprises producing raw materials for trans-national corporations, which are developing rapidly, and small farms whose very existence is threatened. The possible consequences of the current developments in rural areas for the environment and for rural people, women especially, have not yet been fully investigated, nor are they well understood. However, as a result of the recent developments, it has been observed that rural women are increasingly losing their role as food producers and are becoming, like most urban women, food consumers.

4. European rural women constitute a heterogeneous population, with varying socio-economic status and roles, depending on the characteristics of the subregion (whether Central and Eastern Europe, Balkans or European Union), of household and farm structure, occupational activity and personal characteristics such as level of education, age and marital status.

5. They are extensively involved in agriculture as female farm heads, co-owners, and family farm workers. They are also given employment in farm enterprises, often as professionals or skilled labour. A large number of farm women are also active off-farm, in a variety of activities ranging from home-makers to nurses, teachers and blue and white collars or similar.

6. The general situation of European rural women, has been ably summarized at the 9th Session of the WPW in 1998, and the assessment is still relevant in the current situation¹:

“Rural structures across Europe are considerably diverse. Even though European rural women live out their lives in very different rural structures and local political, institutional and material conditions, ... there are many common standards in their predicament and in the issues that affect them. Clearly, rural women are not a homogenous group, even in relation to their occupational activity. Although agriculture remains a key economic activity, many rural women are not on farms but are involved in other aspects of rural life, both paid and unpaid, which contribute to the rural economy. Moreover, rural women experience many forms of gender inequality. Some of the reasons are explained as follows:

- *rural residence in itself creates particular problems of access to resources, services, paid work, training and transport for women;*
- *many rural women are living and working on farms and experience particular difficulties associated with the occupation of farming;*

¹ O'Hara, keynote speech, Ninth Session of the WPW, 1998 (ECA:WRD/98/2).

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- *the promotion of rural and local development as a strategy for sustaining and revitalising rural communities gives rise to particular issues for women;*
 - *rural culture and tradition embodies certain beliefs, values and attitudes about women's place in society which are often reinforced by custom and law”.*

7. Existing gender inequalities in rural communities, households, and societies in general, are a matter for concern, as rural women throughout Europe continue to have limited access to resources – whether economic, political and/or cultural. It is therefore essential to continue improving the status of rural women and prevent any further increase in gender inequalities.

8. At the same time, rural women also need to face the challenges of the new initiatives, resulting in new forms of pluriactivity, means and measures to protect nature and the landscape, food supplies, and newly emerging social relations. Both rural and urban women constitute a vital force in Europe in making farming and rural life viable and environmentally sustainable, as a result of their direct involvement and concern for rural environments, food and welfare.²

9. It is obvious that to meet both present and future challenges for rural societies, in the full respect of local conditions, resources and possibilities, women, because of their central position in sustainable rural development and food security, necessarily play a key role in this process of change.

II. The Importance of Networking and the Role of the WPW – Planning for the Future

10. In a region as heterogeneous and diverse as the European Region, the exchange of ideas, experiences and knowledge is an essential tool for raising awareness of the plight of rural women and achieving their empowerment, so that the major constraints and challenges can be effectively addressed.

11. In this context, networking must be seen as instrumental in the process of exchange and learning that will bring forward the status of the rural woman to the attention of decision-makers and achieve equity in work and living opportunities. In the past 35 years since its establishment, the WPW has been playing an important role in the Member Nations of the Region through its various activities, such as international expert meetings on gender and rural development, seminars, technical consultations, training workshops, pilot projects and research studies (for details see the overview below).

12. In planning future activities, the WPW, as an advisory FAO body, intends to work within the long-term priorities endorsed by the 22nd FAO Regional Conference for Europe (Portugal, July

² The Conference “Gender and rural transformations in Europe” which took place in Wageningen, the Netherlands, in October 1999, presented a wide range of gender issues from various disciplinary and sub-regional perspectives across Europe. The FAO/ECA Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development (WPW) was represented in the Conference International Programme Committee, as the only pan-European network for gender issues in rural development. Material for the Introduction to this document is largely drawn from the keynote speeches and paper abstracts produced by this Conference.

2000)³. It will be recalled that these priorities were developed with a view to identify the needs of the European Region in its agricultural, forestry and fisheries sectors, taking into account, *inter alia*, both the agricultural policies of Western European countries and the special requirements of Central and Eastern European countries and CIS countries as well as the range of expertise available to FAO, the experience accumulated in the Organization and the role of its key partners in emergency and development work.

13. In the context of these long-term priorities and with these considerations in mind, the following short and medium-term priorities (up to 2007) were identified:

1. poverty reduction through support to sustainable rural livelihoods and food security;
2. food safety and quality;
3. sustainable management of natural resources;
4. institution and capacity building to support the process of transition to market economies in the rural sector.

14. The WPW decided it was essential, in planning future activities, to make every effort to mainstream gender into these priorities. It was obvious that, from a gender perspective, certain areas call for immediate and priority attention. Among these, food safety and food quality are the most important and constitute prioritised working areas for many rural and farm women organisations and groups throughout the Region.

15. While, as mentioned earlier, the rural women's traditional role as food producer is progressively shifting towards that of a food consumer, women's role in agriculture and food production remains undoubtedly still very important all over Europe. The crucial question is how to strengthen their future role and participation in a sustainable development of agriculture and rural development, or revitalization of the agricultural and rural sector in those countries affected by war and/or natural disasters, in the face of the shift to increasingly diverse activities and role dimensions that are becoming available to rural societies.

III. Relevance of the FAO Gender and Development Plan of Action (2002-2007) to the Region

16. The **FAO Gender and Development Plan of Action (FAO GAD PoA) for 2002-2007**⁴ is directly relevant to the work of the WPW and key to guiding its activities. The Plan aims at removing the obstacles to women's and men's equal and active participation, and employment benefits from agriculture and rural development. It further emphasises that a transformed partnership based on equality between women and men is an essential condition for people-centred sustainable agricultural and rural development. Its objectives are to promote gender equality in:

³ Report of the 22nd FAO Regional Conference for Europe, Porto, Portugal, 24-28 July 2000 (ERC/00/REP).

⁴ FAO GAD PoA (2002-2007) has been developed in pursuit of FAO's mission to help build a food-secure world (C 2001/9).

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- access to sufficient, safe and nutritionally adequate food;
 - access to control over and management of natural resources, and agricultural support services;
 - 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.

17. In accordance with its mandate, along the lines of FAO GAD PoA (2002-2007) and within the context of the activities of the Regional Office for Europe planned for the period up to 2007, the WPW strategy is to assist the Member Countries in following:

- providing support to the formulation of rural development policies, particularly for less favourable areas, 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 the development of policies for effective land administration and management to facilitate rural development;
- promoting regional cooperation in the collection, dissemination and use of gender-disaggregated data (quantitative and qualitative) and information;
- providing support to the formulation and implementation of the national action plans to promote gender mainstreaming in institutions and development programmes;
- monitoring and evolution of process such as the ageing of the population, the ageing-related feminization/masculinization of agricultural activities and out migration of youth and its impacts on food security; and,
- providing support in strengthening the capacities of rural public institutions, private sector and civil society organizations at all levels to design and implement policies and strategies as well as poverty alleviation and food security programmes that improve the socio-economic and food security conditions of small farmers, the rural poor and other marginalized groups.

18. In this context, it is advisable that the WPW's proposed actions take into consideration and follow closely the strategies and work programmes adopted for the implementation of the FAO GAD/PoA in Europe. This "regionalization" will contribute to the effective removal of obstacles to women's and men's equal and active participation and employment in the european rural sector. Furthermore, the synergy brought about by this arrangement will provide a higher visibility to the proposed WPW activities and ensure a higher level of coherence as activities are linked together and reinforced in working towards a common goal.

IV. Review of the Main WPW Activities in the 2000-2001 Biennium

19. This section provides a detailed report on the activities undertaken by the WPW, during the 2001-2002 biennium. Main events included the 10th Session of the WPW held in Austria (October 2000), the 13th and 14th Summer Schools, held respectively in the United Kingdom (2000) and

Ireland (2001), the workshop on the Implementation of National Action Plans for Women in Development in Slovakia (May 2000).

20. The 10th Session of the WPW was, once again, the occasion to identify priority needs, based on technical inputs to the session and participant's discussions focussed on pertinent aspects of gender-related issues, and to bring forward the process of formulating recommendations relevant to future development. The WPW sessions thus provide a forum for policy-making decisions development of the WPW activities, evaluating of the existing activities and determining the future orientation. This particular session called on the WPW to play a role in shaping policies resulting in programmes targeting rural families and youth groups.

21. The workshop on National Action Plans for Women in Development was also an excellent opportunity to exchanges experiences and ideas on the use of various tools and methods in different socio-economic and political environments in the European Region and on how to use the SEAGA framework to improve the socio-economic situation of rural women and insure their involvement in various phases of the rural development process through the development and implementation of the National Action Plan for Rural Women in Development (NAPs for RWID). In this connection, it should be recalled that in 1998, a joint effort of FAO and Empresa Publica para el Desarrollo Agrario y Pesquero de Andalucía (Public Enterprise for Agrarian Development of Andalucía – D.A.P.) from Spain was initiated to develop a methodology to allow for collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data. This has resulted in a study, "The Study on the Socio-economic Situation of Rural Women in Spain", to be published in 2002.

22. As to the Summer Schools, they were found by the participants to be very useful exercises, providing for a unique opportunity to learn from each other and focus on relevant and emerging gender-related issues. The WPW Board, at its last Meeting in December 2001, agreed to change the name of the summer schools to the **WPW Expert Meeting on Gender and Rural Development**, to be held with the same frequency as the summer schools, i.e. annually. It was felt that the new title better reflected the real nature of the "summer school" meetings.

23. The box below provides a snapshot overview of the various activities undertaken in the biennium.

Summary of WPW Activities in 2000-2001

The Tenth Session of the WPW⁵ was held in Innsbruck, Austria from 4 to 7 October 2000 and was hosted by the Government of the Republic of Austria. The theme of the Session was Challenges and Opportunities for Youth in Rural Areas. The Session was attended by 33 persons from 14 countries (8 western European and 6 CEE and CIS countries), 2 organizations with observer status, and FAO.

The Session acknowledged the ripple effect of the activities of the WPW, resulting in regional and subregional workshops, seminars, the dissemination of methodologies and international exchanges of experiences and emphasised the importance of the continuation of the work of the WPW, as it is the only group within the European Region that works specifically with the issues faced by rural women (the Report of the Tenth Session, para. 10)⁶. The Session pointed to the need to increase the participation of rural youth in the political decision-making processes at all levels, enhance the quality and relevancy of educational structures and processes targeting rural youth and adjust the rural socio-economic structures to the on-going global changes and develop framework conditions addressing local employment needs and initiatives. In order to promote a gender and youth sensitive rural policy, the delegates of the Tenth Session recommended also the introduction of:

- an information policy targeting rural youth including a campaign to promote rural life vis-à-vis youth
- an information campaign to promote the image of rural areas vis-à-vis general public and development of a communication policy targeting rural youth.

The **13th Summer School⁷** was held in Pembrokeshire, United Kingdom, 10-15 September 2000. The theme of the event hosted by the National Assembly of Wales and Welsh Development Agency was "Networking and Partnership Building for Rural Development". The overall objective was for participants to build up their capacity, enhance their knowledge and gain skills for networking and partnership building in rural development. In total, 25 persons from 15 countries attended.

The **14th Summer School** took place in Kiltimagh, Ireland, 16-22 September 2001. The theme of the Summer School, hosted by the Irish Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, was the "Alternative Initiatives for Rural Development". The overall objective of the Summer School was for participants to gain knowledge and skills for rural development by learning how to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of different alternative approaches to rural development and how to use different tools and methodologies to mobilize local communities. In total, 30 persons from 16 countries attended.

The **Workshop⁸ on the Implementation of National Action Plans for Women in Development** was held in Liptovsky Mikulas (13-19 May 2000). It was organized jointly with the WPW and the Slovak Ministry of Agriculture and Agency for Rural Development. The objective of the Workshop was to reflect on the current situation concerning National Action Plan for Rural Women in Development (NAP for RWID) in the FAO European Region and to develop and/or revise the action plans, on the basis of the lessons learnt. The Workshop was fourth in the line of the workshops on preparation and implementation of the national action plan organized by FAO. The Workshop brought together 21 participants from throughout the FAO European Region representing various ministries, local authorities, and research institutions, NGOs.

⁵ The WPW sessions are held biannually. Since 1980, ten WPW sessions have been held. The theme of the sessions is chosen by the WPW from the suggestions given from 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).

⁶ Report of the Tenth WPW Session, Innsbruck, Austria 4-7 October, 2000 (WPW/00/REP).

⁷ Summer schools are regarded as one of the most important and influential activities of WPW. They are organized annually, jointly with a Member Nation. Summer schools focus on training techniques, methodologies and the acquisition of information and skills necessary in the rural development process. Themes of the summer schools in the past range from management of rural development projects, people's participation in rural development, small business and rural tourism development, entrepreneurship, development alliances - partnerships and networks to communication techniques and information technology, and socio-economic and gender analyses.

⁸ WPW workshops and seminars focus on specific problems of rural women in the FAO European Region.

V. Proposed Future Activities: Workplan for 2002-2003

24. In future, the WPW 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 by the last WPW Sessions (Armenia, 1998 and Austria, 2000), International Summer Schools (Estonia, 1999, United Kingdom, 2000 and Ireland 2001) and other meetings, workshops and seminars where WPW has participated.

Proposed future major activities include:

- 15th WPW Expert Meeting on Gender and Rural Development (Finland, June 2002);
- 11th WPW Session (Switzerland, 14-17 October 2002);
- WPW Board Meeting, 1st week of December 2002 (tentative date), FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy;
- WPW Board Meeting, 1st week of December 2003 (tentative date), FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy;
- International Seminar on planning, monitoring and evaluation of rural development projects with a view to achieving improved integration of gender dimension (country to be determined, 2002 or 2003, dates depending on the availability of funding);
- 16th Expert Meeting on Gender and Rural Development (country to be determined, June 2002);
- International Workshop on Gender-disaggregated Data (host country to be determined, 2002 or 2003 dates depending on the availability of funding).

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

25. With a view to calling attention on gender issues in the forthcoming WFS: fyl and secure for rural women a vital role in meeting the challenges of ensuring sustainable development and food security, the WPW has developed the following recommendations for the attention of the ECA and the forthcoming FAO Regional Conference :

At international level

- Provision of technical and financial support to enable associations and organizations of rural women throughout Europe to become more visible and effective in lobbying for empowerment of rural women through various activities, i.e. programmes and project;
- Greater attention by given by the international community to the status and socio-economic situation of rural women in the development processes and food security in Europe as they are key agents for social and economic changes; this is best achieved by systematically placing rural women and gender issues on the agenda of the international conferences, seminars, disseminating information and supporting the promotion of celebration of the World Rural Women's Day throughout the region;
- Addressing rural women's deteriorated situation in those European countries devastated by war and affected by natural disasters;

- Provision of development assistance and support wherever rural women suffer from social isolation, limited access to ownership of land and credit and social security and services, poor access to extension services, low level of participation in public affairs;
- Strengthening the WPW facilitation role in networking and exchange of experiences, thereby contributing to rural women's empowerment in public and political spheres; this requires additional funding and increased support for WPW's activities.

At national level

- Promotion of gender mainstreaming into rural and agricultural policies through measures to increase gender awareness among the policy and decision-makers, including capacity building and training;
- Provision of improved basic infrastructures (communications, health, childcare, etc.), to support expanded female access to training and employment (i.e. through programmes and projects);
- Support to both the formulation and implementation of National Action Plans for Gender in Rural Development; this can be facilitated by relying on and/or disseminating the methodology developed by FAO and supporting training events;
- ensuring fair economic evaluation through the development of gender-sensitive indicators, to track women's contribution to the economic activity of farms and achieve recognition of the work performed by spouses;
- ensuring equality for both sexes regarding the legislation for ownership and taxation of farms/holdings in agriculture by enforcing already existing legislation that promotes equality or revising legislation through a gender perspective;
- enhancing the access of rural women to institutional and financial support, credits and loans, for entrepreneurial and professional activities.

At local level

- supporting technically and financially the promotion of mechanisms or rural organizations such as clubs, networks, associations of rural women to strengthen their position and to help them play a key role in the improvement/development of their local area ;
- provision of entrepreneurship training to rural women to improve their managerial skills;
- providing an appropriate range of training opportunities and career guidance tailored to rural women's needs and capabilities;
- increasing access to the tools of socio-economic and gender analysis (SEAGA) through programmes and projects through capacity building and training programmes;
- supporting networking and partnership among rural women and men and among rural and urban women .

26. To pull together the above mentioned measures in a coherent overall framework, , it is suggested that the ECA provide full support to the implementation of the FAO GAD PoA in the European Region.

27 The Programme, to be developed by the WPW in collaboration with the Regional Office for Europe would be intended to address the suggested above-mentioned measures through a series of projects operating at regional, national and even, if resources permit, at local level. It would give priority to areas most seriously affected by war and natural disasters where poverty and food insecurity are at their highest. The Programme would be implemented progressively, in line with the amount of resources forthcoming. The Programme could be presented at the next session of the ECA. Alternatively, the ECA might consider accelerating the timetable for preparation of the Programme, and a special meeting of interested donors could be called under the aegis of the WPW, and organized at a suitable time in Rome by FAO.