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Regional Conference for Europe

EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON AGRICULTURE

THIRTY EIGHTH SESSION

Bucharest, Romania, 1 and 2 April 2014

Agenda Item 7

The Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development (WPW): An Alternative Way Forward

Executive Summary

The mandate of the WPW, under the guidance of its Board, is to bring together key stakeholders of the gender and rural development sector in the Europe and Central Asia Region and provide a platform for dialogue, knowledge exchange and participatory policy advice to enhance rural gender equality. The main objective of this paper is to outline the situation of the WPW and to present an alternative proposal to the WPW. Section II presents the mandate of the WPW and Section III summarizes the main concern regarding the WPW's role and the results and conclusions from the evaluation as well as concerns raised at (and after) the European Regional Conference in Baku, 2012. Section IV presents an alternative mechanisms for the WPW.

Guidance Sought

The ECA is invited to:

- Review and endorse the alternative approach proposed for mainstreaming gender activities in the Region in an efficient and cost-effective manner within FAO's new Strategic Framework and provide guidance on how to move forward to decide on its application at the 38th European Commission on Agriculture Session and the 29th European Regional Conference in Bucharest, Romania (1 – 4 April 2014).

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I. Background

1. The Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development (WPW) is a subsidiary statutory body of the European Commission on Agriculture (ECA), established by the Commission in 1965. The Secretariat of the WPW is located in the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) in Budapest and reports to the ECA.

2. The Evaluation¹ of FAO Regional and Subregional Offices in Central Asia presented to the 113 Programme Committee in 2012 outlined that in the absence of strong support from the members the WPW loses its *raison d'être* and suggested to prepare alternative proposals to ensure that gender and social inclusion is fully mainstreamed in FAO's work. Also the ECA 2012² requested the review of the work of the WPW, particularly with emphasis on the role of the WPW. In this context the main objective of this paper is to outline the situation of the WPW and to present a proposal for an alternative mechanisms to the WPW.

II. The objective and functions of the WPW

3. The mandate of the WPW, under the guidance of its Board, is to bring together key stakeholders of the gender and rural development sector in the REU region and provide a platform for dialogue, knowledge exchange and participatory policy advice to enhance rural gender equality.

4. During the last three years, the WPW Secretariat, hosted by REU, has been composed of FAO staff including the Assistant Director-General/Regional Representative for REU.

5. The costs for the Secretariat are covered by the Regular Programme of FAO. In addition, a multi-donor trust fund with contributions from Austria, Lithuania, Norway and Switzerland was operational between 2006 and 2011 to cover costs for the participation of country representatives at WPW sessions, expert meetings and related activities. However, these funds have been depleted and the Trust Fund has been closed. The Trust Fund contained a total of USD 55 947, which had been exhausted by the end of 2011.

6. The WPW historically held annual expert meetings and biennial sessions, open to all member countries of the Europe and Central Asia Region. Since 2004, six expert meetings and four WPW sessions were organized. The frequency of these meetings has been irregular, mainly due to financial constraints and to the absence of member country follow-up. Attendance to WPW sessions appeared to be highly variable as well, from 20 to 45 participants (depended significantly on location, i.e. whether in HQ).

7. The Secretariat based in REU made several attempts to revitalize the WPW, including the preparation and presentation of a Report to the ECA on the Status of the WPW in 2008, (35/08/4 - Status of the ECA Working Party on Women and the Family in Rural Development). Board meetings were also held to strengthen cooperation among key stakeholder.

8. The last (22nd) WPW Expert Meeting in February 2012 focused on rural gender statistics to synergize with REU's work on rural sex-disaggregated data. While for the new elections of the Board in the last Session (organize back-to-back with Expert Meeting, in February 2012, Rome) and following no new nominations from the member countries, all the previous board members were re-elected (with one member resigning). The board members are from Italy (chair), Albania, Lithuania, and Ukraine.

¹ PC 113/3 – Evaluation of FAOs Regional and Sub-regional Offices for Europe and Central Asia. Final Evaluation Report <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/027/mf581e.pdf>

² 37th ECA 2012, Baku Final Report para. 22c

http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Europe/documents/ECA/ECA37/ECA37_en/ECA37_12_Report_en.pdf

III. Concerns expressed by the Evaluation and Member Countries

9. Despite positive feedback on the last Expert Meeting, member countries appeared to be concerned that the WPW is no longer able to effectively fulfil its mandate, due to the irregularity of its activities and lack of follow-up at country level. In addition, its relevance has also been questioned by some member countries: “despite the importance of the topic, they felt that WPW was no longer relevant and useful to the membership” (Evaluation, para 122). Consequently, member countries asked the Secretariat to propose (and refine) an alternative mechanism to the WPW.

10. Based on the criticism by key stakeholders regarding the relevance and effectiveness of the WPW as well as on the fact that limited evidence of uptake of WPW work/recommendations was found at country level, the Evaluation³, under paragraphs 123 and 124 of section 4.2.6, notes the following: “The effectiveness and efficiency of the WPW both to ‘help in reducing gender inequalities in rural areas and to contribute actively to achieve the empowerment of rural women’ as per its goal and in improving the mainstreaming of gender into FAO’s work, is debatable.”

11. The Evaluation also observed that “the mandate of the WPW of bringing together stakeholders and be a platform of exchange could be easily taken on by other existing networks, e.g. the DAC Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET), and REU itself could establish and maintain a network of Gender Focal Points in the Europe and Central Asia Member Countries, and organize meetings on a case-by-case basis”. The Evaluation recognizes, in the absence of membership support, and a tangible structure, a body like the WPW loses its *raison d’être*. It notes that assigning funds and staff-time to the WPW does not appear to be a cost-effective use of the Organization’s resources under the current budgetary restrictions.

12. In this context, the Evaluation formulated Recommendation 2, in Section 11.

Based on an in-depth analysis of the evidence available and further dialogue with all concerned parties, REU, SEC and ESW should prepare a proposal to be submitted to the 2014 ERC on the most cost-effective way forward to ensure that gender and social inclusion perspectives are fully mainstreamed into FAO’s work in the Region.

Independently from the contents of the proposal, progress made in mainstreaming gender and social inclusion in the work of the Organization in the Region should become a permanent standing item on the ERC agenda.

13. The status and effectiveness of the WPW were extensively discussed at the 37th Session of the ECA (Agenda Item 5) and the 28th Session of the ERC in Baku, Azerbaijan in April 2012. The main recommendations stemming from the ERC Final Report were as follows: “The Regional Conference expressed concern regarding the future of the WPW and urged member countries to review and discuss the proposals regarding (i) the creation of a national Gender Focal point in the ministries; (ii) revised roles and responsibilities of the board and the secretariat of the WPW ... (paragraph 36 c)”.

14. Furthermore, as recorded by the minutes of the meeting 34/3 Meeting of the Executive Committee held on 7 February 2013, the Chair of the WPW Board “highlighted that the main problem of the WPW, and in particular the Expert Meetings, are poor participation and lack of interest expressed by member countries” (para.5). Additionally, the summary of this minutes states that “there was overall consensus in principle with the draft proposal presented by the Secretariat” (after paragraph 6) for an alternative mechanism for the WPW. The outlines of this are presented in this Agenda Item for information and discussion.

IV. An alternative mechanism to the WPW

15. Following the guidance received from the ERC, the ECA and the Executive Committee and the Evaluation, an alternative mechanism to the WPW, with three main components, has been proposed:

³ <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/027/mf581e.pdf>

abolition of the WPW; mainstreaming of gender activities through the FAO Reviewed Strategic Framework, and establishment of a Trust Fund dedicated to gender related activities.

16. The proposal to abolish the WPW is based on, and takes full consideration of the reviewed FAO Strategic Framework under which gender is to be fully and explicitly mainstreamed as a cross-cutting theme across all the Objectives. Furthermore, newly established outputs under the various Objectives require specific gender-focused planning and activities. Therefore, under this new Strategic Framework, FAO is intrinsically accountable to the member countries for the gender mainstreaming of all activities and related outputs, and for which human and financial resources are allocated. This entails ensuring that gender is mainstreamed in all Country Programming Frameworks (CPF) and Regional Priorities. This provides a significant and effective alternative to the role of the WPW.

17. In addition, the proposed alternative mechanism takes full consideration of the comments and recommendations of the Evaluation, which also refer to “the urgent need to recruit a Senior Gender and Social Protection officer with the clear mandate to ensure that all FAO products and projects in the Europe and Central Asia Region fully integrate both gender and social inclusion perspectives” (Rec2, ES31).

18. Elaborating on the draft proposal and on the feedback received from the member countries and reviewed at the 34/3 Meeting of the Executive Committee, and taking into account the above three key considerations, the alternative mechanism would:

- As recommended by the last ERC, the aforementioned evaluation of REU, and within the framework of the new Strategic Objectives, the progress of gender-related activities will regularly be reported to the Regional Conference, and the recommendations of the Conference will further direct and feed the gender work.
- The enlargement, strengthening and elaboration of the existing network of thematic, information and data experts and partners, which was formed over the last three years of FAO's focus on gender in agriculture and related data (national and international). The role of this network, and its programme of cooperation and interaction with FAO, will be directly linked to the Outputs of the new Strategic Framework, the Regional Priorities and to the Country Programming Frameworks (CPF).

19. The Regional Network will aim at involving the gender focal points (GFPs) nominated (or to be nominated) by national institutions – such as Ministries of Agriculture/ Forestry/ Fishery, Rural Development, Social Affairs, Health, Labour, National Statistical Offices - as well as GFPs from other UN organizations. In addition to the gender focal points, women's cooperatives, NGOs/ CSOs (working in the field of gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture and the rural sector), pertinent research institutions and advisory services will be invited to take an active role within the network. Private sector will be also strongly encouraged to join. This approach is directly in line with the increasing focus of FAO on partnerships with NGOs and civil society organizations, as well as with the public and private sectors, as promoted by FAO and agreed by the membership⁴. As a case in point, REU participated in the Congress of European Farmers organized in Budapest, by Copa-Cogeca (umbrella organization of European farmers and cooperatives) in October 2012. In this regard, increased cooperation with its Women's Committee could be the start of tangibly strengthening this Regional Gender Network, for which the experience and involvement of the new REU Gender and Social Protection and the Partnership Officers would be essential and valuable.

20. This Regional Gender Network will be linked to other relevant FAO networks and bodies through the exchange of information and participatory activities that would lead to joint-planning and the identification of synergies. Management and coordination of this network by FAO REU would ensure effective focus on gender equality issues in rural areas in the Region, based on recent lessons learnt.

21. Furthermore, FAO staff resources that are presently focused on the WPW can be refocused on effectively enlarging and strengthening this Regional Gender Network, on allocating more time to

⁴ Joint Meeting of the Programme and Finance Committee (Nov. 2012) 3.2 and CL 145/5 para. 17-20

formulating rural gender initiatives and on the direct management of activities. This would be a much more efficient use of resources, both human and financial.

22. More specifically, this network, in addition to supporting FAO – directly at the country level, where impact is most essential – in mainstreaming gender and implementing the planned activities related to the programmed products and services to achieve the established Outputs, in close cooperation and coordination with the new REU Gender and Partnerships Officers, will further support FAO in:

- Identifying key gender issues and challenges in the agricultural and rural sector, assist in providing analysis of cause and effect, and provide related essential data for evidence-based policy decisions;
- Propose new research methodologies, tools and best practices to FAO to be used in regional and national projects and programs;
- Provide advice and an evidence-based platform to national institutions on gender issues in the agricultural and rural sector to enable a more demand-driven cooperation with FAO;
- Advise FAO on potential funding sources and facilitate dialogue between donors and implementers.

23. Taking into consideration the gender-specific Outputs across the newly established Strategic Objectives and the enhanced dedicated capacity at REU, the programme of work of the Network can be preliminarily summarized as follows:

- Ensuring that gender is mainstreamed, first and foremost, at country level, mainly through the elaboration of the CPF;
- Joint project proposals to support FAO in achieving the established Outputs under the new Strategic Framework ;
- Proposed research methodologies and tools applied in studies and programmes;
- Identifying and liaising with potential extra-budgetary funding sources.

24. The linkages with the ERC will mainly consist of REU reporting and providing advice and clarifications to the membership on rural gender issues as well as on on-going and planned gender-related activities within the new Strategic Framework. Furthermore, the ERC, will continue to be a forum on which REU will receive advice and guidance from member countries on gender issues in the rural and agricultural sector (in identifying the Regional Priorities). Lastly, the ERC could possibly be a forum on which key regional and national rural gender organizations and institutions actively participate as part of the enhanced network.

25. Notwithstanding the increased availability of Regular Programme resources for rural gender equality in REU, a dedicated Trust Fund would provide solid financial support for gender focused activities in the Region. It would be used to support specific research and studies, technical training to national counterparts (research tools and methods) and specific thematic meetings, and other relevant activities as required. In addition to the abovementioned programme of work, the network is expected to formulate detailed programme/project(s) based on the results of research activities supported by the TF. The women/gender equality focused programme/project would be in line with Regional Priorities and Initiative and be based on the capacities and skill mix of network members. Complementing available FAO Regular Programme resources, the Trust Fund is thus crucial in ensuring the success of gender related activities in the region.