

**Statement of the  
Director-General of FAO**

**Special Event on Gender Equality and Access to Factors of Production**

**FAO, Rome, 21 November 2005**

*Excellencies,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is an honour to welcome you to FAO today on the occasion of this Special Event on Gender Equality and Access to Factors of Production.

Two years after the adoption of the Millennium Declaration, the world's political leaders meeting at the World Food Summit: *five years later* in 2002 recalled the vital importance of the role of women in agriculture, nutrition and food security and the need to integrate this reality into all aspects of food security. They recognized that measures were needed to ensure that the work of rural women was recognized and valued. This would help strengthen their economic security, and their access and control of resources and services.

Yet, the paradox remains true whereby a large proportion of the world's food is produced by women, but women are denied access to the essential tools of their work, including factors of production, credit, information, training and the power to take decisions.

In March 2005, 180 Member Nations of the United Nations ratified the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*. Without the implementation of this international instrument, it will not be possible to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, in particular the halving of poverty and hunger by 2015.

Women are at the forefront of food production in all regions of the world. In Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, women produce at least 80 percent of the food staples. In South and Southeast Asia, women are responsible for some 60 percent of agriculture and food production. In many regions, their contribution has risen because of male migration to urban areas. Thus, in parts of China, male migration has caused a 70 to 80 percent increase in the female agricultural workforce.

More needs to be done to promote the employment of women, whether formal or informal, as a means of combating poverty and of reinforcing their economic security. Women need to have access to information and to benefit from extension so that they can take informed decisions.

Women's access to land should be placed at the heart of national and international development policy. Women are estimated to account for 20 percent of agricultural landowners in Sub-Saharan Africa, for 6 percent in Asia and the Pacific, and for 23 percent in the Americas.

In many societies, the fetching of water is a traditional task for the womenfolk. Without improving their access to clean water, and to all factors of production, it will be difficult to combat poverty and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Globalization represents a challenge for rural women, but also an opportunity. It can of course lead to an accumulation of wealth for a minority and an aggravation of poverty for a majority of the population. But it could also exacerbate gender inequalities. The obstacles facing

rural women therefore need to be removed if they are to adapt to the new conditions of the international market.

The persistence of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria is another major threat. Today, 51 percent of adult victims of HIV/AIDS are women. The widows and orphans of AIDS victims often lose access to land and to other factors of production. The impact of these diseases on women needs to be mitigated.

Also needed are information disaggregated by gender and age and databases on gender-based inequalities. Once the needs of men and women have been identified, an appropriate legal framework can be developed to guarantee equal rights and access to factors of production, credit, land ownership, information and technical assistance.

Finally, additional financing needs to be mobilized, including microcredit, for women to accelerate their social and economic development.

The Assembly of Heads of State and Government at the African Union Summit in Maputo, in July 2003, represented an important landmark for the advance of rural women. It decided to increase investment in the agricultural sector to combat poverty and hunger, and to allocate at least 10 percent of national budgetary resources to agricultural development within a period of five years.

Also encouraging are the international commitments to increase development assistance (up to 0.7 percent of GNP) made under the Monterrey Consensus and strengthened by the G8 decisions at Gleneagles. The task now is convert these political commitments into action.

FAO is ready to assist Member Nations in defining and applying the measures required to ensure that women have access to factors of production. Programmes against hunger and poverty, but also programmes for social and economic development, will not succeed unless women have equal access to factors of production; unless women are able to apply and adapt their knowledge and experience; unless women are able to benefit from information and improved technology, from resources and credit, and from legally recognized access to land and land ownership.

I am sure that your meeting will be working in this direction.

Thank you for your kind attention.