

**Statement by Mrs. Martha Hirpa, Director of Gender Equity and Young People's Initiative,
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On the occasion of the Third UN ECE RIM on CSD 2008,

Geneva, 29 January 2008

Honorable Ambassador of the Royal Netherlands, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honor for me to be here at the Third UN ECE Regional Implementation Meeting on Sustainable Development. I would like to thank the Secretariat of the UN ECE RIM for giving this opportunity to the Women Major Group and to the Civil Society group in general to discuss how we can give prominence to the themes of the CSD 16 on agriculture, rural development, land, drought, desertification in Africa. This UN ECE RIM brings together a unique mix of member countries - from the donors and from countries in-transition, as well as a broad range of interconnected themes that is very important for the Africa region.

The Women Major Group played an active role during the Africa RIM in Addis Ababa, last October and again in the Asia RIM in Jakarta. Heifer International, my organization, supported the two Side Events and one skills building workshop through our collaboration with Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN); one from the Women Major Group organized by WOCAN, the African Women Leaders in Agriculture and Environment (AWLAE) and the GRATIS Foundation; and the other from SARD Multi-Stakeholder Major Group, and Skills Building Workshop on Advocacy and Negotiation. I am pleased to say, for the first time, the civil society major groups were able to participate actively and contribute their rich experiences from the field during the debates and discussions of the Africa and Asia RIMs.

There is an underlying reason why Heifer International is working closely with the Women Major Group and other civil society groups and organizations. Heifer has a mission of ending poverty and hunger and caring for the earth. Heifer realizes that this mission cannot be fulfilled without partnership and commitment to compliment and support each others' effort. The fact that women make up 70% of the world's poor, produce nearly 80% of food consumed in African households, owning only 10% of land (2% in Africa), and agriculture providing 90% of the basic needs of African people, does not need any further justification for Heifer's focus on women and agriculture.

There is no doubt that all the thematic areas of the CSD 16/17 are intrinsically linked to each other. Agriculture, rural development and land issues are source of livelihood for Africa, while drought and desertification are day to day challenges to life. For women of Africa, who carry the burden of feeding and sustaining life, who depend on natural resources to play their roles as mothers and sisters, those issues are as close as their breath to them.

We need to address the systemic barriers facing women, particularly women farmers who are increasingly becoming the face of poverty in Africa. On the one hand, women farmers are expected to meet the demand of their families for survival. On the other hand, they are confronted with multi-faceted challenges, including, lack of productive assets, limited or no access to farm inputs, lack of access to modern technologies, lack of access to market and shortage of time- due to their workload, among others. Instability, malnutrition and disease have multiplied their challenges by geometric progression, placing them in even more powerless status to negotiate with the multi-layer system in this globalized world.

Concerns

The current crises of agriculture, farming and pastoral communities are exacerbating poverty and inequities in poor rural communities. On top of that, interventions to address the crises are also not adequately addressing the challenges of women farmers and marginalized groups.

- The promotion of bio-fuel and the Green Revolution for Africa are without in-depth analyses of their effect on women and the marginalized groups. Competition for land between food crops and bio-fuel crops increases the risk of pushing women to use more marginal and unproductive land, jeopardizing their abilities to produce food and the health of the forests and environment.
- Emerging issues such as climate change and bio-energy are main concerns for women as they are challenged by this change to fulfill their role as food and energy producers. On the other hand, women's indigenous knowledge and practices in agriculture and natural resources management are not considered. Agriculture technology designers continue to ignore the special needs of rural women.
- Rapid urban migration and industrialization is breaking the social fabric of societies, which for centuries have served as a safety net for women and the poor. The liberalization policies and the dominance of the powerful agro-business are widening the gaps between the rural poor and the rich powerful people. This process is forcing many women, especially women heads of households, to fall from a status of poverty to destitution.
- International and free trade agreements are made without analyzing impacts on women and the poor. About 12 percent of the world's population live in Africa¹, but Africa accounts for only two percent of the world's trade. The inability to trade with the world is one of the major reasons why most Africans live on less than two dollars a day. Furthermore, globalization has increased women's unpaid work as public social services are privatized. At the same time it has decreased the quality of their paid work opportunities adding on the already overrepresented number of women in low-paying, labour-intensive sectors.
- Absence of young people in African economic and social development processes is another alarming situation for the years to come. Current farming systems and agriculture are not attractive to the youth, creating excuses for out-flux of young people from rural areas to urban and pre-urban areas adding on the already saturated unemployment.
- Underfunding for gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment projects has crippled the progress of gender equity in agriculture and rural development. For example, in 2006, out of USD \$ 69 billion development aid in 2003, only 2.5 billion (3.6%) had gender as a significant or principal objective. Aid with gender equality as a principal objective was only 0.6% (USD \$ 400 million). In the same year, only 0.04% (USD \$2.5 million out of 6.8 billion) of the European Commission aid went to women specific programs and projects.²
- Inefficient accountability systems in government offices in Africa and lack of bench marks and appropriate indicators to measure progresses in agriculture and gender mainstreaming in all sectors is another challenge yet to be solved.
- War and conflict in Africa have put their tolls on women and children. For women it is not only becoming victims of such instability, but also is an add on burden of picking up pieces, cleaning and fixing ,in many cases, under impossible situations.

¹ Women's Edge Coalition, 2007

²² Association of Women in Development, 2006.

Recommendations

We want to strengthen the strategies that will make African women not only participate with active voice but also be engaged in planning, decision-making, and benefiting from development interventions and processes, at all levels and in all sectors in Africa. More specifically we want to see the following recommendations implemented:

- Women, particularly rural women, as key players and decision makers in agriculture, research, extension and farm policy discourse;
- More female extension agents working with rural women, in a gender friendly and conducive working environment;
- More investment on African women to match resources and capacity with their challenging roles of feeding, caring and sustaining lives.
- Women's leadership, management and negotiation skills are strengthened.
- Women owned businesses flourishing in Africa, and wages and working conditions improved to benefit women and men alike.
- Gender mainstreaming graduating from a mere lip service to a practical development strategy to respond to the gender gaps in all development sectors of Africa- agriculture and rural development sectors included.
- Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, able to trade its products and women reaping the benefits of their labor and skills. Most of these products are produced by women in the absence of adequate resources, and while struggling with poverty, hunger, disease-HIV-AIDS, and conflicts.
- African customizes its agriculture and farming systems to remain attractive to young people, and halt the inter-generational inequity by investing on its girls and boys alike.
- Proper accountability systems put in place to do away with corruption at different levels and in different structures of African government systems. Monitoring indicators developed and implemented by all development actors to measure progresses toward gender equity and equality.
- More support provided to strengthen women organizations, women leaders, and gender focal points and coordinators at various levels through provision of resources and building capacities. African women leaders are put in a challenging situation as they are divided between trying to fit into a framework set for men leaders and playing gender roles.
- More donors directing their development assistance towards gender equality and African women focusing on agriculture and rural development as a means to ending poverty from Africa.
- Women, given space and resources to play active role in conflict resolutions and negotiations for peace in African and international communities.

Ways forward

For all of the above reasons and for the reasons articulated during the Africa and Asia RIMs, the Women Major Group strongly believes that providing equal spaces and equal participation for both women and men at CSD 16 & 17 is crucial. It will enrich the dialogue, shapes the outcome and map out the implementation process of the thematic and cross-cutting issues of the CSD. Bringing more women into the intergovernmental discourse, particularly those working in agriculture sector at the debate with CSD governments to review experiences, learn from them and propose strengthening and new reforms at the national level and at CSD 16 in New York will add significant value to the process and the content. Furthermore, the Women Major Group realized the necessity to prepare a fertile ground for discussion at the national level which can

be done through case studies, discussions among diverse stakeholders and with other major groups for consultations prior to CSD in New York.

Women As the Voice for the Environment also known as WAVE was launched at UNEP in 2004. Among the headline speakers was Professor Wangari Maathai, winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize. She spoke on the theme 'A World in Need of Women's Leadership'. Under the banner of WAVE, as the first Global Women's Assembly on the Environment, it highlighted the crucial roles women play in conservation and sustainable development.

Now, we, as part of the Women Major Group at CSD started to reflect our learning from WAVE and asked our selves, why can't we have something similar initiative, for women ministers of agriculture – Women As the Voice for the Agriculture Network (WAVAN). With this in mind and to further build momentum for the CSD 16 & 17, the Women Major Group is proposing to organize a High Level Special Event with women ministers of agriculture and women leaders and champions from civil society in May 2008 in New York. The broad objective of this high level event will be to achieve gender equity in agriculture, rural development and land policies for pro-poor and pro-women growth in developing countries based on the WSSD Implementation Plan. We believe that this conference will (i) stimulate dialogue and cooperation between the ministers and Women Major Groups participants in the global North and South as well as relevant international organizations leading to CSD 16 and 17 and beyond; (ii) create avenues for working together and supporting each other in the face of globalization; (iii) promote investments and partnerships, particularly focusing on strengthening women's leadership and decision making status to serve as a stepping stone for active participation in local, national and international decisions; and, (iv) coordinate efforts and share resources and jointly work toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

At this event we hope to gather a strong group of committed women leaders that will bring innovative ideas to the table, give new energy to the discussion on the themes of the CSD and define a concrete set of actions that will help us mobilize public as well as private funding to invest on rural women of Africa and other developing regions.

The Women Major Group Side Event on "Investing in Agriculture: for WHOM, WHERE, and WHAT?" organized by WOCAN in partnership with Heifer International and IFAD, last evening also discussed some of these issues.

Like other NGOs that provide funding and support for innovative initiatives, Heifer puts much emphasis on pro-poor initiatives aiming at elevating the poor, especially women as they shoulder much of the responsibilities to sustain lives and care for the earth. Effective partnership that ranges from small producers, to consumers, to service providers, to government, to donors and private business owners is so critical to address the overwhelming and ever increasing poverty in Africa.

I hope that this Interactive session will prove to be a way forward for such partnership in a new way of working together on the issues of women farmers and poverty in Africa.

Thank you for your attention!