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Women could feed millions more people if given access to means of production – UN



7 March 2011 – Women in rural areas have the potential to raise agricultural production to levels that would feed up to 150 million more of the world’s hungry people if they had equal access to the means of production, including land, financial services, education and technology, according to a United Nations report released today.

The [“State of Food and Agriculture” report](#) of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) says that yields on plots managed by women are lower than those managed by men because women do not have equal access to capital.

“The report makes a powerful business case for promoting gender equality in agriculture,” [says](#) Jacques Diouf, the FAO Director-General.

“Gender equality is not just a lofty ideal, it is also crucial for agricultural development and food security. We must promote gender equality and empower women in agriculture to win, sustainably, the fight against hunger and extreme poverty,” he added.

Giving women the same access as men to agricultural resources could increase production on women’s farms in developing countries by 20 to 30 per cent, raising total farm output in poorer regions by 2.5 to 4 per cent. That could in turn reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12 to 17 per cent, or 100 to 150 million people, according to the report.

An estimated 925 million people in the world were undernourished in 2010, the vast majority of them in developing countries.

“We must eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, ensure that access to resources is more equal and that agricultural policies and programmes are gender-aware, and make women’s voices heard in decision-making at all levels. Women must be seen as equal partners in sustainable development,” said Mr. Diouf.

Women make up on average 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, ranging from 20 per cent in Latin America to almost 50 per cent in East and South-east Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Where rural women are employed, they tend to be segregated into lower paid occupations and are more likely to be in less secure forms of employment, such as seasonal, part-time or low-wage jobs, the agency notes in its report.

New jobs in high-value export-oriented agro-industries offer better opportunities for women than traditional agriculture, the report says.

The report documents gender gaps in the access to a wide range of agricultural resources, including land, livestock, farm labour, education, extension services, credit, fertilizers and equipment.

Women in all regions generally have less access to land than men. For those developing countries for which data are available, between 3 and 20 per cent of all landholders are women. The share of women in the agricultural labour force is much higher and ranges from 20 to 50 per cent in developing countries.

“Women farmers typically achieve lower yields than men, not because they are less skilled, but because they operate smaller farms and use fewer inputs like fertilizers, improved seeds and tools,” said Terri Raney, editor of the report.

“Evidence from many countries shows that policies can promote gender equality and empower women in agriculture and rural employment. The first priority is to eliminate discrimination under the law,” said Ms. Raney.

“In many countries women do not have the same rights as men to buy, sell or inherit land, to open a savings account or borrow money, to sign a contract or sell their produce. Where legal rights exist on paper, they often are not honoured

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