



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement by International Labour Office
Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
56th session
General Discussion on Rural Women, 7 October 2013

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished members of the Committee,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the International Labour Organization (ILO) I would like to thank you for inviting us to participate in this important discussion. We welcome the Committee's comprehensive concept note, which raises many of the challenges and opportunities facing rural women, and addresses issues at the core of the ILO's mandate.

Since its inception, the ILO has recognised the role of rural development as a key driver of economic growth and poverty eradication. In this context, the Organization has focused on rural women's empowerment as a key strategic objective of its mandate to improve rural livelihoods. The ILO has repeatedly called on States to promote gender and social justice in rural communities and to strengthen the participation of women in workers' organizations and cooperatives in rural areas.

ILO's Decent Work Agenda, with its integrated approach to standards and rights at work, employment creation/enterprise development, social protection and social dialogue, offers a comprehensive framework to assist countries in addressing persistent and structural gaps in rural areas, such as limited access to education and public services, limited livelihood opportunities, precarious employment and low productivity.

International labour standards are an essential pillar of development and are crucial in order to address issues which disproportionately affect rural areas, such as precarious employment, informality, low wages and the absence of social protection. Governments can and should take a lead role in closing the labour rights gap for rural workers - especially women and agricultural workers - by ratifying and implementing relevant international labour Conventions. There are Conventions that refer specifically to rural workers, notably the Rural Workers' Organisations Convention, 1975 (No. 141), which affirms the rights of all rural workers to establish and join organizations as a means of ensuring workers' participation in

economic and social development. Recommendation No. 149, which accompanies the Convention, emphasizes the importance of developing and implementing programmes to support women's empowerment, and of integrating them into general education and vocational training programmes.

More broadly, the ILO fundamental Conventions are part of the international human rights framework and, consequently, of the international framework for women's rights and gender equality. The fundamental equality Conventions - the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No.111) - have been ratified by 171 and 172 member States respectively, indicating the global acceptance of the rights set out therein. Conventions Nos. 100 and 111 influenced the provisions in CEDAW, and along with the comments of the ILO supervisory bodies, elaborate on the employment and occupation aspects of some of the rights set out in the CEDAW instrument.

As part of its mandate, the ILO also supports its constituents through research, knowledge-sharing, policy advice and technical cooperation in order to develop targeted mechanisms and tools to enhance rural women's potential and promote the sustainable growth of rural areas. For example, building on the principles enshrined in the Recommendation on the Promotion of Cooperatives, 2002 (No. 193), the ILO has collaborated closely with the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), FAO, WFO and UNDESA to strengthen the role of cooperatives as key channels for addressing gender equality issues and fostering economic advancement for women and men, both in urban and rural areas.

With a view to promoting rural women's entrepreneurship, the ILO has assisted governments, workers' and employers' organizations in their efforts to improve women's access to services and productive and financial resources. Through the Microfinance for Decent Work Research Programme (MF4DW, 2008-2012),¹ the ILO has partnered with 16 microfinance institutions worldwide to expand livelihood opportunities and improve working conditions among microfinance clients, with initiatives that focus on promoting gender equality through women's entrepreneurship training. Women who received both a loan and training measurably increased their opportunities of self-employment and business expansion.

For further information on the ILO's vast array of rural-relevant approaches and tools, I would like to draw attention to two main publications available here today. The first, entitled "Unleashing the potential for Rural Development through Decent Work", is a review on the ILO Rural Work Legacy from 1970 to 2010. The other is a series of *Gender and Rural Employment Policy Briefs*, which address a range of issues faced by rural women in their

¹ Link to microfinance institution responsible for entrepreneurship training
http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/projectdocumentation/wcms_186199.pdf

Link to the programme: http://www.ilo.org/employment/areas/social-finance/WCMS_168033/lang--en/index.htm

work environment. The briefs were inspired by the 2009 FAO-IFAD-ILO Workshop on “Gaps, trends and current research in gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment: differentiated pathways out of poverty”.

We also made available a few copies of the ILO Policy Briefs on Rural Development, which are action-oriented guidance tools covering selected sectors, specific groups and technical areas - such as skills development, social protection floor and value chains - that are engines of rural growth, poverty alleviation and equitable development.

Finally, I would like to refer to the recently published manual on Freedom of Association for Women Rural Workers, which addresses issues such as improving women’s representation in decision-making bodies and in trade union representation; and to the discussion paper on women, gender and the informal economy, which provides an overview of ILO research undertaken over the last two decades.

Chair, ladies and gentlemen, the ILO is committed to achieving Decent Work for all women and men in pursuit of universal social justice. The ILO remain stands ready to assist its constituents, and to coordinate efforts with the Committee, UN entities and other stakeholders to protect and promote rural women’s rights.

Thank you.