



WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION
ORGANISATION MONDIALE DU COMMERCE
ORGANIZACIÓN MUNDIAL DEL COMERCIO

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30 APR 2012

Dear Madam,

You have asked us on 2 April 2012 to express our views and comments on the concept note for the preliminary study on rural women and the right to food circulated in document A/HRC/AC/8/CRP.2 dated 14 February 2012.

We thank you for this initiative and wish to express some comments in relation to the following sentence in paragraph 21 of the concept note: *"In the context of an increasingly liberalized trade in agricultural products, governmental strategies and policies should be designed to specifically protect women's access to food from adverse effect of liberalization, and to enhance their capacity and entitlement to purchase food"*.

We consider that this sentence implies some prejudgement on the possible effects that trade liberalization could have on women's access to food, by making reference only to possible "adverse effects" and not to positive effects of trade liberalization.

Following the approach suggested in paragraph 17 of the concept note, we would agree that the identification of strategies and policies for the legal protection of rural women should be based on available reports, studies and research outputs. Many recommendations included in the note explicitly refer to internationally recognized studies, like for example the one on inequality between men and women addressed in paragraph 20. However, the sentence on trade is not supported by any reference.

I would draw your attention, in particular to conclusions of studies by international organizations discussing the role of women in development. For example, the *"State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011: Women in agriculture. Closing the gender gap for development"* by FAO does not mention any potential adverse effect of trade liberalization. Similarly, the *"World and Development Report 2012: Gender equality and development"* World Bank report, though not focusing specifically on agricultural trade, notes that *"forces such as trade openness and the spread of cheaper information and communication technologies have the potential to reduce gender disparities by connecting women to markets and economic opportunities, reshaping attitudes and norms among women and men about gender relations, and encouraging countries to promote gender equality"*.

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Both these reports and other studies like the "*Women, Food security and agriculture in a market place: A significant shift*" 2008 study by the International Center for Research on Women note that closing the gender gap in agriculture in relation to factors like access to land, education, financial services..., could significantly contribute to food security in general and for women in particular. These effects occur both directly through the improvement of subsistence farming production, but also indirectly, through better revenues resulting from better access by women to commercial and high value export oriented farming.

In many reports, it is therefore concluded that governmental policies should help women to benefit fully from the opportunities created by the development of modern agricultural value chains in parallel with trade liberalization.

Finally, as noted in the recent World Bank 2012 Global Monitoring Report, women are in general more vulnerable to economic shocks, and trade liberalization protects national food markets against domestic shocks by allowing more food to be imported in times of shortage and exported in periods of plenty. Thus, since trade liberalization protects national food markets against domestic shocks, it can have a disproportionately positive impact on female headed households.

We would therefore suggest that the sentence reads as follows: "*Governmental strategies and policies should also be designed to enhance women's capacity and entitlement to purchase food and to ensure that women fully benefit from the opportunities created by trade liberalization in the agricultural sector*".

Yours sincerely,



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Director

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