



Accelerating Rural Women's Economic Empowerment through Innovation and Joint Efforts

The vital role of rural women in sustainable development was on the agenda at the 60th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, held in New York from 14 to 24 March. The challenges faced by rural women in the context of the SDGs were discussed at a side event jointly organized by FAO, IFAD, UNWomen and WFP on 18 March.

The event followed the recent approval of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women's (CEDAW) General Recommendation on the Rights of Rural Women. It also focused on the achievements and lessons learned by the Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (RWEE) that is currently being implemented by the four agencies in seven countries: Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda.

In her opening speech, Sieane Abdul-Baki, Deputy Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection of Liberia, underlined that "more attention should be paid to the needs of rural women, as they provide the majority of agricultural production in developing countries and their contributions and leadership are key to achieving the 2030 Agenda".



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From Left to Right: Carla Mucavi, Director of the FAO Liaison Office in New York; Azzurra Chiarini, JP RWEE International Coordinator; Clare Bishop-Sambrook, ISC Chair, IFAD; Erika Joergensen, Director of the WFP Office in New York; Aissatou Abdou, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Gender of Niger; May-Elin Stener, Deputy Permanent Representative of Norway to the UN; José Alberto Antonio Sandoval Cojulún, Permanent Representative of Guatemala to the UN; Zhyrgagul Turmamatova, RWEE National Coordinator in Kyrgyzstan; and Venge Nyirongo, UN Women Policy Specialist

This was echoed by the insights and experiences shared by Clare Bishop-Sambrook, Chair of RWEE's International Steering Committee and IFAD's Lead Technical Specialist (Gender and Social Inclusion), and Zhyrgagul Turmamatova, RWEE National Coordinator in Kyrgyzstan and UNWomen Programme Manager.



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Women farmers at work in the fields in the Dosso Region of Niger

Bishop-Sambrook highlighted that the Joint Programme is now “delivering what donors often ask UN agencies to do: implementing complementary activities on an integrated agenda using pooled financing. In particular, the approach of targeting interventions to the same group of beneficiaries is having a stronger impact on their livelihoods and will help inform future investments in the rural sector”.

Turmamatova’s intervention focused on how the comprehensive, participatory approach adopted by the Joint Programme in Kyrgyzstan is not only empowering rural women economically, but also addressing other challenges that they face, such as gender-based violence, reproductive ill health and the burden of unpaid care work.

During the panel discussion that followed, moderator May-Elin Stener, Deputy Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations, created a dialogue with the representatives of governments and United Nations agencies from the countries participating in the Joint Programme.

According to the panellists, the key success factors for initiatives on rural women’s empowerment include:

- building on each agency’s innovative approaches for agricultural development and gender equality
- using common entry points for activities on the ground
- actively involving men in the design and implementation of interventions.

In this regard, one of the main objectives of the RWEE is to identify and scale up good practices that will further strengthen inter-agency collaboration to empower rural women economically and to end extreme poverty and hunger everywhere.

As underlined by José Alberto Antonio Sandoval Cojulún, Permanent Representative of Guatemala to the United Nations, in his closing remarks, “this Joint Programme is not only supporting women’s empowerment, but is also creating communities free from violence and economic deprivation”.



Participants agreed that there is an urgent need to increase investment to fight the significant discrimination that rural women still face in agriculture compared to their male counterparts. For this reason, before closing the event Ambassador Stener called on the international community to provide additional funding to the Joint Programme.

Pictures of the event can be found at the following link:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/faolony/sets/72157666125858375>

For more information about the Joint Programme on “Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women”, please contact: Azzurra Chiarini, JP RWEE Coordinator, azzurra.chiarini@wfp.org