



Empowering Women to End Hunger

Lessons learned from the FAO-IFAD-WFP-UN Women Joint Programme on Accelerating Rural Women's Economic Empowerment – CFS side event

“Progress in the 2030 Agenda cannot be made if we do not achieve gender equality”, highlighted Lourdes Magana de Larriva, Advisor at the Delegation of the European Union to the UN, co-chair of the Network for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, during the event *Empowering Women to End Hunger*, held in FAO Rome on 19 October. Jointly organized by the Gender Network and FAO, IFAD, WFP and UN Women in the context of the 43rd Committee on Food Security, the event focused on the achievements and lessons learned of the Joint Programme on *Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (RWEE)*.

Improved food security and nutrition are key priorities of the Joint Programme, which seeks to respond to the multiple challenges that rural women face – from limited access to productive assets and services to lack of representation in decision-making and leadership positions. Implemented since 2014, the RWEE is currently piloted in seven countries – Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda – and works to boost the productive potential of rural women by improving their access to and control over resources, services and opportunities and by building their capacity to stay free from hunger, poverty and discrimination.

Mats Åberg, Senior Programme Specialist at the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Joint Programme's main donor, underlined that the RWEE is helping to increase rural women's economic opportunities and address gender inequalities, which is essential to meet the challenges of food insecurity and hunger elimination. “The RWEE is an advanced programme in that it is fully aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, while being launched much before its adoption”, added de Larriva.

Despite operating with only half of the funding needed for its full implementation, the RWEE has



already helped some 18,000 women across seven countries to improve their food security and nutrition thanks to the contributions from Sweden and Norway. Yet, the programme still faces a major challenge in terms of funding. Participants called upon the international community and development partners to join efforts and resources to upscale the Joint Programme. It is estimated that if additional

funding is provided, the RWEE could benefit additional 32,000 women and directly reach around 50,000 people in total.



As highlighted by Brave Ndisale, Chair of the RWEE International Steering Committee and Director a.i. of the Social Policies and Rural institutions Division at FAO, in 2015 alone the Joint Programme supported some 3,500 women farmers and 1,000 men to improve their access to agricultural inputs. Over 1,750 women gained access to financial services and 1,600 beneficiaries were trained in food processing and storage, including home processing and low-cost drying technologies. Over 2,000 women were organised in cooperatives, and women leaders participated in national rural women's conferences to make their voices be heard. In addition, literacy and numeracy trainings improved women's social capital and participation in public life.

The positive impact of the Joint Programme on food insecurity and hunger reduction was illustrated by the insights and experiences shared by Ramon Garway, RWEE National Coordinator in Liberia, and Alma Valdez, RWEE National Coordinator in Guatemala.

In Liberia, the Joint Programme has reached around 10,000 women, who received farming inputs to increase rice and cassava production and benefitted from trainings on nutrition-sensitive agriculture and improved access to infrastructure (such as Community Grain Reserves). These interventions have resulted in increased agricultural production, the income from which women use to pay for health, education, and water and sanitation services.

In Guatemala, where about 90% of women are food insecure, the Joint Programme is building women's capacities on healthy household practices for food security and nutrition, including manipulation of food for consumption, cleanliness, waste management and recycling of disposable materials. As explained by Alma Valdez, this has enhanced the food security of target communities in the country. The RWEE is also strengthening rural women's capacity to grow diverse crops for household consumption, achieve higher yields and improve household diets.

The panelists have identified several core strengths of the Joint Programme, including: close collaboration of the four participating agencies with local communities, inclusion of climate-resilient agricultural approaches in training and capacity building programmes, and meaningful engagement of men. This has ensured the success of the RWEE and will contribute to the sustainability of its results. In his closing remarks, Erkinbek Choduev, Kyrgyzstan's Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Amelioration, praised FAO, IFAD, WFP and UN Women for their excellent collaboration with the government and other national stakeholders in Kyrgyzstan, and called for a continuous support to better integrate gender equality considerations into national policies and programmes for food security and rural development.

Pictures of the event can be found at:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/f150pgo5b03qvw1/AADal70my8wPq52wj1YSk595a?dl=0>

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