

**DPI Weekly briefing to NGOs associated with DPI
United Nations, New York, 16 October 2008**

The economic empowerment of rural women

As the Secretary-General noted in his message for the International Day of Rural Women, the economic empowerment of rural women is not only important for women themselves, but is also for enhancing the wellbeing of their children, communities and ultimately their countries.

Rural women play a critical role in the rural economies of both developed and developing countries - in crop production, livestock care, and income generating activities both on- and off-farm, as well as in household maintenance and care-giving. Their economic empowerment is critical to the fulfilment of all these responsibilities. The potential for economic empowerment of rural women is influenced by their position within household and community structures; the gender division of labour; their access to and control over resources; and their participation in decision-making. In many parts of the world rural women face serious challenges in all these areas.

The many changes underway in rural areas have a direct impact on women's lives, in both positive and negative ways. Economic changes can intensify gender biases - for example land privatization programmes can undermine women's traditional land use rights. On the other hand, many women, particularly younger women, have found that independent sources of income give them the confidence to question traditional views of rural women's roles both in the household and in society, and to challenge gender biases in access to resources.

In many countries, gender-based stereotypes and discrimination continue to deny women equitable access to and control over land and other productive resources, opportunities for employment and income-generating activities, access to education and health care, and opportunities for participation in public life - all of which constrains their economic empowerment.

Women receive only a small share of formal agricultural credit even in countries where they are major producers. As land is the major asset used as collateral to obtain rural credit, women have limited access to credit facilities. Estimates indicate that only 10 per cent of agricultural credit is extended to women.

It is not possible to consider the emp8Tw(splc-.0s. As lap0001 Tw land is th)T19.07 Tw()Tj-yf form

Third Committee on Tuesday this week, “The empowerment of women, particularly those living in rural areas, is a strong factor in Malawi’s poverty reduction processes.”

Climate change and the food and energy crises

Women’s economic empowerment is also critical for addressing the current challenges of climate change and food crises. Rural women are vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Drought and intermittent rainfall patterns directly impact women as primary producers of staple food. The rising incidence of desertification increases the time burden on women and girls as they have to walk further to collect water and firewood. As a result they have to forego opportunities which are important for their economic empowerment, such as attending school and undertaking income-generation

The environmental and socio-economic transformations resulting from the growing global demand for liquid biofuels may have differential impacts on women and men in rural areas. There could be different risks with regard to access to and control over land and other productive assets, employment opportunities and food security, all of which have implications for economic emp

particularly important to ensure that rural women are consulted, and their situations adequately reflected and addressed, in national development strategies, Poverty Eradication Strategies and national Millennium Development Goals Reports.

Micro-credit and other financial services are an effective tool for poverty reduction. Evidence suggests that lending to women is more cost-effective as women are better and more reliable credit-takers, compared with men,. Furthermore, women's income is consistently utilized for expenditures that are beneficial to the entire family and the wider community.

Increased investment of financial resources is needed to improve the situation of rural women. The message of the Secretary-General made this very clear, and I quote: "I urge all countries to seize the opportunity we will have next month at the Conference on Financing for Development in Doha to put the needs of rural women at the top of the global agenda."

Thank you.