



"The Empowerment of Rural Women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication: development challenges and the way forward"

A presentation

At the

56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

BY:

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Headquarters of the United Nations

New York, 28 February 2012

Statement by
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At
The Opening of the 56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

**“The Empowerment of Rural Women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication,
development challenges and the way forward”**
Feb 28, 2012

Chair
Deputy Secretary – General
Under Secretary – General
Excellencies
Distinguished delegates

Women in Liberia suffer disproportionately from the effects of poverty, yet they have increasingly had limited opportunity to participate in the political, economic and social processes that can change that condition. This lack of voice maintains structural inequalities that keeps women trapped in a cycle of poverty. Thus, rural women's participation and leadership in decision making processes that affect their lives is crucial to breaking this cycle and building a peaceful and prosperous future.

The Rural Women in Liberia make up a good portion of the Country's population. They are the major contributors to the well-being of the families and are an integral part of the country's development. The rural women are the backbone of the national economic progress; in excess, as well as key contributors to the informal sector. They are bringing markets and are doing the agricultural work and they are more than 75% of all cash and food crop production. In agriculture-producing households rural women are involved in up to 70% of cash crop production and 93% of food crop production. In addition, they conduct 85% of all marketing and capital investment in crop production for income generation. Despite their contributions to the country's economy and development rural women continue to have lack or have limited access to education, employment, resources and markets.

Empowerment of Rural Women

The Government of Liberia through the Ministry of Gender and Development have implemented the Rural Women Program in 2008 to ensure that all rural women are given a chance to partake in and benefit from all projects at a decentralized level. In addition, the program provides rural women with the structure through which they voice their priorities and needs, and lead initiatives in their own communities and villages.

We have since the establishment of the Program implemented the following interventions:

- Consistent with the poverty reduction strategy which is framework of our development agenda, the provision of farming inputs (seeds, tools, rain boots, fertilizer and agricultural) were made available to female farmers. In line with this, the Government and its Partners

through the Ministry of Gender and Development complemented the Food Security and Nutrition Program.

- Provided funding of 2.2 million USD to assist 150 women groups in the construction of storage facilities.
- Established local leadership of the Rural Women Program in 15 counties and strengthened their existence by the provision of coordination office space and transportation services for their work.
- Hosting of yearly conference for the rural women which provided the platform to discuss, assess and take stock of the progress of the program for the development and advancement of rural women in Liberia.
- Construction of 16 sites of Peace Huts.
- The Ministry of Gender and Development in collaboration with the Indian Government, in 2011, selected eight (8) rural women who were charged with the responsibility to undergo a six-month (September 2011-March 2012) training course in Solar Electrification at the Bareilly College in India. Upon graduation, they were instructed to carry out village solar electrification in their various counties.
- In additional effort to address the issue of deforestation and climate change, we have implemented a project for rural in Bomi county with support from UNDP. 40 rural women were trained in eco-stove project in an aim to reduce the use of charcoal which is a major driver of deforestation.

Poverty and hunger eradication

The Government has made significant efforts in the eradication of poverty and hunger eradication by providing economic opportunities for rural women and the implementation of the Joint Program on Food Security and Nutrition Program.

Economic opportunities

- The Government of Liberia worked to improve the livelihoods of over 2000 women from the country in the informal sector by the establishment of the Cross-City Trade Association. The Joint Program on Gender Equity and Women Empowerment (JPGEW) has increased women's access to financial services where at least 4,700 rural business women received loans for business expansion.
- 355 rural women through similar program established 15 Village Saving Loans Association in 5 of the 15 counties. Through the same program, 1,075 women received their literacy training while 983 women from 17 markets completed training in business planning, credit, records keeping and the use of calculators and personal finance. Mean while, plans are being put into place to build hostels for 500 students attending high institute.
- We have also worked towards strengthening the capacity of government and civil society to promote gender equality in the country. A Gender Policy of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and women groups that was developed across the country in areas of women empowerment and gender equality was published.

New Partnership for Africa's Development Project (NEPAD)

The government through the implementation of NEPAD, which is funded by the World Bank, provided micro loans on interest free basis to small scale farming and agriculture activities in the five counties.

Hunger Eradication

The GIZ/ UN Joint Program Food Security and Nutrition was firstly implemented in 2007 in order to mitigate the impact of economic crises, maintain access to food and improved nutrition for the most vulnerable people by creating safety nets and promoting the increase in domestic food production. The project focuses particularly on women who represent the majority of small-holder producers and are the agricultural labor force in general in Liberia.

- The Food Security and Nutrition Program established 43 farming groups in the rural women structures in three of the 15 counties in Liberia. The program delivered 37,457 pieces of assorted quality farming tools and 150 metric tons of seed rice to the 43 groups and provided training in power tillage, irrigation management, and maintenance and increased capacity of women in improved farming methods and use of modern inputs, accessing and organization development.
- Approximately 12,000 rural women farmers received Government and private partners farm inputs and implements including assorted hoes, shovels, rakes, hand tools, power tillage tractors, mass grain driers, rice mill and hand tools to boost agricultural activities. As a result there is an increase in agriculture yields and productivity.
- The construction of storage post harvest processing facilities, market facilities and rehabilitation of roads to link women groups and markets from their towns to the villages have also been undertaken under this program.

Challenges

Despite the numerous support rendered towards the empowerment of rural women in Liberia, and the enormous contributions made, there are still some major challenges, being encountered by them:

- The empowerment of rural women and girls is still challenged by gender inequality, disparities, in infrastructure, financial and human resources, as well as lack of access to relevant information and health services, such as those related to family planning, pregnancy, emergency obstetric care and skilled care during childbirth. Poverty, conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies exacerbate reproductive health problems in many countries. The empowerment of women and girls living in rural areas is further challenged by limited educational and economic opportunities, as well as socio-cultural barriers. Addressing these challenges requires integrated political and programmes that both involve and support rural women. Additionally, low social and economic status of these rural women increased the risk of having their human and reproductive rights violated, and leading to their suffering.

disproportionately from gender-based violence, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, and maternal and neonatal morbidity and deaths.

- Insufficient farming/agricultural materials and primitive method of farming, equipment, the need for food, medicine, and other inputs to increase their production. There is a need for modern means of transportation to ensure longevity of produce (or prevent spoilage of produce) and to also ensure that during seasonal shortages produce is available for market. Insufficient storage facilities are also issues that are affecting the rural women in Liberia.

Conclusion

Facilitating women's entry into the economy is critical, especially for countries like Liberia which is not only recovering from a long and pervasive conflict that has left the country's population in a state of economic hardship, but also working to end decades of social, political and gender discrimination that have severely excluded women from the economic and political processes that shape their lives.

Ensuring that rural women can claim the right to sexual and reproductive health is a crucial first step in eradicating poverty and hunger. Improved access to reproductive health services is a key driver to women's economic empowerment – when a woman has autonomy over her reproductive choices, her sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights (for example, she is able to decide who and when to marry, how many children to have and when), she is in a better position to be economically empowered.

We believe strongly that empowering women economically has not only led to increase in their personal wellbeing, but also that of society as a whole.

We also believe that by increasing women's participation in the labor force, there will be increased earning which is associated with reduced poverty, improved economic growth and better health and education for their children.

Therefore, we will remain committed and steadfast in providing economic opportunities for rural women thereby promoting their participation in the economy. But this can only be possible through Enhanced Participation, Collaboration and Social Inclusion. The vision of Liberia and the work of building a brighter future for Liberia does not rest on governments' shoulders alone. Civil society, women's groups, CBOs, FBOs etc. must be empowered to lead and take action.

Finally, we call on international partners to prioritize funding that reaches communities and the most vulnerable women. For Liberia, greater impacts could be made with programs by ensuring that target percentages of no-acknowledges are taking programs down to the community level. Capacity building and policy development. Although technical capacity and policy are necessary, our interventions must reach the women, particularly at a grassroots level.

Thank You!