

A woman wearing a vibrant, multi-colored patterned headwrap and a matching sleeveless top and skirt sits on the ground next to a large, circular concrete water tank. She is holding a large bundle of green leafy vegetables, possibly fennel or a similar root vegetable, with both hands. She is looking towards the right side of the frame. The background shows a field of green crops. The text "Speeches by officials" is overlaid in white on the image.

Speeches by officials

Luc Tayart de Borms

Managing director, King Baudouin Foundation



I would like to begin by welcoming you to the premises of the King Baudouin Foundation for the closure of the FAO-Dimitra workshop in which you have just participated.

It is a great pleasure for me to see all of the partners of the FAO-Dimitra workshop here at the King Baudouin Foundation and to see how the Dimitra network has grown over the years, which is obvious by the higher number of participants in the workshop. The commitment of all of these partners has meant that we now talk about a Dimitra spirit. We at the King Baudouin Foundation are proud to contribute to Dimitra. This is why the Foundation has been working for several years on boosting synergies with the Dimitra network's partners in the provinces of South Kivu and Katanga in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

An awareness-raising project on HIV/AIDS was conducted in partnership with Dimitra and GTZ-Health, supporting SAMWAKI, a network of rural women's organisations that was created in 2002 and is one of Dimitra's partners. With the support of the FAO-Dimitra project, SAMWAKI has set up radio listeners' clubs and has distributed 44 solar-powered and wind-up radios.

In rural areas, little is done to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS. In partnership with Dimitra and GTZ-Health, SAMWAKI integrated awareness-raising on gender issues and HIV/AIDS into its activities by forming nine rural 'radio listeners' clubs' to discuss HIV/AIDS and develop strategies for advocacy and action.

Initial results, which are very encouraging, show that:

- men and women are represented equally when it comes to managing radio listeners' clubs;
- in three territories, men now accompany their wives to prenatal consultations, where information is given about HIV;
- thanks to their attendance of prenatal consultations, men are increasingly willing to be tested for HIV.

We are very pleased that this joint initiative has been recognised by FAO's evaluation service as an example of "successful integration of raising awareness of HIV/AIDS into an FAO project".

Furthermore, a good indicator of this initiative's success is that the radio listeners' clubs method is going to be replicated in Katanga Province by REFED-Katanga, Dimitra's partner in Lubumbashi, with the support of GTZ-Health, SAMWAKI and FAO.

It is a great pleasure for the King Baudouin Foundation to have supported the FAO-Dimitra project for so many years, and I would like to congratulate the project for its high-quality activities and the impact of its work.

I am particularly pleased to see all of those who work in the field here today. You are the ones who make things move, contribute to changes in behaviour and work for the well-being of your communities.

I am also very glad of this opportunity to meet all of the other participants who, with their knowledge and expertise, help to strengthen the network. I refer to the technical divisions of FAO as well as the representatives of bilateral organisations, GTZ-Health and the Swiss and Canadian development cooperation agencies.

I will be very interested to hear more about what you have been discussing all week and I can assure you that the King Baudouin Foundation will pay very close attention to your conclusions and recommendations.



Joergen Maersk Pedersen
Director of the FAO Liaison Office
with the European Union and Belgium



It is an honour for me to join the partners of the FAO-Dimitra project a little more than three years after the workshop on the impact of HIV/AIDS on food security.

The theme of this year's workshop, developing information and communication strategies to fight gender inequality in access to land in Africa, is vitally important for agriculture, nutrition and food security on the African continent.

Africa is currently being badly affected by the massive increase in the price of foodstuffs. This price explosion is forcing more and more vulnerable people, particularly women, far below the poverty line. It is having devastating consequences for households who sometimes spend more than 80% of their income on food.

The African continent is very vulnerable in this food crisis. It imports up to 70% of the food it needs, whereas in the 1970s, it was self-sufficient. Decades of negligence and inadequate investments in the agricultural sector account for the lack and poor state of infrastructure. On average, only 7% of arable land in Africa is irrigated (dropping to 4% in sub-Saharan Africa), while the average is 17% for the world and 38% in Asia. Crop losses are sometimes as high as 40 to 60% for some agricultural products.

It is no longer necessary to prove the vital importance of women's role in food security. At major conferences and summits in recent years, political leaders from all over the world have pointed out and reiterated the need to adopt measures aiming to guarantee rural women work and increase their economic security as well as their control of and access to resources and services. Particular examples include the Food Summits in Rome in 1996 and 2002, the Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development in Porto Alegre in 2006 and, more recently, the High-Level Conference on World Food Security in Rome in June 2008.

In 2005, the UN's member states ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. If this international instrument is not applied, it will not be possible to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, particularly those relating to reducing poverty and hunger by half by 2015.

And yet there is still a paradox: a high proportion of foodstuffs are produced by women, but women are often denied access to the instruments they need for this work, such as the factors of production, credit, information, training and decision-making power.

Most cultivable surfaces are owned by men, with women only owning 20% of arable land at the very most in many countries. Despite owning so little land, women in sub-Saharan Africa are responsible for around 80% of food production and make up 80 to 90% of the workforce in processing, storing and transporting food. In many regions, their contribution is even larger due to the exodus of men towards the towns.

Land tenure rights are often held by men or family groups controlled by men, and women only have access to land via a male relative, usually a father or husband. Moreover, the limited access to land that women do have is very unstable.

A Zambian study has shown that over a third of widows are denied access to the family land after their husbands die. A World Bank study conducted in Ghana demonstrated that when women have tenure rights for the land they are cultivating, there is a significant rise in productivity: female agricultural workers who do not have guaranteed tenure rights are less inclined to let their land lie fallow, and yields are severely reduced as a result. Estimates say that their production could increase by a third if they were given deeds to the land.

Despite concerted efforts in several countries to promote equal rights for women with regard to land, as part of the agenda for development, many institutional, social, cultural and particularly economic obstacles still exist, meaning that rural families, and especially women, are denied appropriate access to land and the guarantee of being able to use the land and its produce.

The international community is now committed to dedicating more resources to supporting the agricultural sector in developing countries, especially the productivity of food-producing crops, in which women play an important role. Strategies and solutions for increasing production, developing sustainable agriculture and ensuring fair development must involve giving rural women access to information and communication.

The FAO-Dimitra project's vital activities in this domain are indisputably recognised by everyone. The project is able to make its information tools and communication methods available for spreading knowledge and encouraging discussion of access to and control of productive resources.

This has certainly been the case for the work we did today on gender inequality in land access.

The Dimitra project's exemplary activities over the years were made possible by the support and financial involvement of the Belgian Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and the King Baudouin Foundation, both of which I would like to thank very much on behalf of FAO. My thanks also go to all other donors contributing to the project's activities in the field, including GTZ and the Swiss and Canadian development cooperation agencies, to name but a few.

I would like to conclude by thanking the entire coordination team of the Dimitra project, all of its partners who are here today and finally everyone from FAO's technical divisions for your dynamism and your contribution to the project's success.

Marcela Villarreal

Director, Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division

FAO



Gender and access to land: the impact of crisis situations

In spite of numerous commitments by the international community, FAO recently presented disturbing new numbers on food insecurity in the world.

In addition to the 842 million undernourished people before the crisis, 75 million became undernourished due to soaring food prices. As usual, it is the poorest people who suffer the most from this type of crisis.

FAO analysed who was most affected by this crisis. Using data from 12 countries, we found that those most affected are the urban poor; not surprisingly, as they cannot or usually do not produce food and cannot afford to buy it if it becomes more expensive. But an interesting finding in the poorest countries was that also in rural areas, most people are not net food sellers but net food buyers. One tends to assume that people in the rural areas are food producers, but nationally representative data showed that more or less two thirds of rural dwellers are net food buyers! Of course, they are much more affected than others by the current crisis because they have to pay for their food and are not able to increase their production to the level in which they would profit from selling the produce at a higher price.

Another finding was that in all the countries under analysis, the most affected by the crisis are female-headed households. There are several reasons for this:

- Generally, male-headed households own statistically larger average land holdings than female-headed households (in some countries, male-headed households have land holdings which are up to three times larger than those of female-headed households).
- In equal conditions and at the same level of income, female-headed households tend to spend relatively more on food than male-headed households. Therefore, increased food prices will affect them more.
- There is a huge difference in access to resources, and very specifically to land. Hence, the data show clearly that the fact that female-headed households carry the brunt of the crisis is related to the issue of lack of access and/or ownership of land and other productive resources.

Considering these findings, FAO has recommended to governments a policy agenda to mitigate the impact of soaring food prices:

- Safety nets, social protection and rapid recovery of agriculture;
- Improving trade policies;
- Stimulating agricultural investment and supply response as fundamental priorities;
- Creating a global enabling environment for carrying out policies.

Female headed households should be given special attention particularly when developing safety nets, as well as for targeting households to increase small scale production through the distribution of subsidised inputs.

Gender and land in sub-Saharan Africa

Land rights in sub-Saharan Africa, as in other regions, are governed by institutions that are culturally and socially determined. Many sub-Saharan African countries, for example, practice a custom called “levirate”, a system in which, when a husband dies, the wife will marry one of the brothers or another relative of the deceased person. On the one hand, levirate can be seen as social protection: the widow will not be left on her own, she will continue to be part of the clan and therefore will have access to its resources. But on the other hand, levirate, besides being a custom which does not allow women the right to choose their partner, can be seen as an institution that protects male rights to land, as it doesn’t allow women to own land. They only have access to land through marriage, and if the marriage breaks up, through for example HIV/AIDS or any other crisis situation, the women lose their access to the clan’s resources, and very specifically to land. It is therefore important to promote women’s property rights, not only to ensure access, as access rights may be temporary.

In many countries, there are laws that give equal property rights to women and men. However, in most cases these laws are not enforced. Most of the time, the customary systems that grant inheritance in property rights only to men have prevalence over the statutory laws that advocate for equality of land inheritance.

The impact of HIV/AIDS on land access and ownership

HIV/AIDS is one of the issues which have been extensively discussed throughout the week. Available data show that the spread of the epidemic is incredibly fast and its consequences huge, even in countries where HIV prevalence rates are starting to go down. Even in those places, the impact of the crisis is going to be felt for a very long time. AIDS orphans, for example, estimated to be 18 million in 2010, will grow up without the agricultural skills and knowledge that their parents would have transferred to them. Without this knowledge, their future food security will be compromised.

FAO has been studying the impact of HIV/AIDS on the agricultural sector, on agricultural labour and production and on food security for nearly 20 years. Over the years, we have found that the epidemic has very concrete impacts on land tenure systems: loss of land rights, including inheritance rights, shifts in ownership tenure and distress-sales. The use of land is also changing because of the epidemic. Very specifically, there is a huge reduction in the amount of land cultivated in the most affected areas.

There is also an increase of the traditional custom whereby male relatives of a widow grab her property and that of the deceased man. In one of FAO's studies in Namibia, 42% of widows reported losing cattle, livestock and farm equipment. Many other studies have also shown loss of land, very specifically land grabbing by male relatives of widows, leaving these women completely destitute. We have also seen an increase in intra-familial disputes related to land and HIV/AIDS.

Another FAO study showed that female-headed households in the northern province of Zambia have smaller average land size than male-headed households affected by HIV/AIDS, and all of these are significantly smaller than those of households not affected by HIV/AIDS.

Many studies have demonstrated a clear interaction between HIV/AIDS, gender issues, land issues, increase of vulnerability and increase of food insecurity.

What can we do?

There is a need for:

- Promoting statutory laws which address these issues, very specifically those related to the interaction between HIV/AIDS, gender and land systems, in order to have more equality in the distribution of resources.
- Information and communication initiatives involving all of the local stakeholders, including community leaders, religious leaders, traditional healers, etc.
- Setting up community watchdogs. The example of listeners' clubs can be very powerful to address this specific kind of issue.
- Improved public policy so that it can reach more effectively the most vulnerable.
- Promoting the empowerment of women with specific strategies, based on information and communication.
- More research to provide data that allows to better understand the situation, and to inform information, communication and advocacy campaigns.
- Effective communication strategies which are context-dependent: in order to be effective and to address the specific needs of different groups, communication strategies have to be very clearly grounded in the local context and the cultural norms, institutions, attitudes, values and history of that context.
- Active promotion of property rights for women, not only promote and advocate for access to land and inputs.

Malawi: an example of a communication campaign

In Malawi FAO promoted, together with other organisations, an amendment to the Wills and Inheritance Act, in order to improve property and inheritance rights for women. Through this amendment, any property grabbing by a deceased spouse's relatives is declared to be a criminal act, subject to prosecution. The bill was passed as a result of a large information and communication campaign which aimed to convince people by making them see how this bill would be important to reduce food insecurity and to promote gender equality.

A lot of work was done through information and communication, sensitization and awareness-raising on the relationship between property grabbing, food insecurity and poverty. There were also quite innovative workshops with media houses and, at the level of decision-makers, with the parliament and at community level on writing wills. A big radio campaign with jingles, thematic advertisements, radio dramas and all-in panel discussions was organised for about four weeks. All programmes were broadcast in local languages, in order to reach more people.

The outcomes of this information and communication campaign were:

- An increased awareness among rural and urban people on the existence of this Bill;
- Enhanced understanding of the importance of writing a will;
- Enhanced understanding of the relationship between property grabbing and food security (many people called the radio station telling them their stories of property grabbing).

I would like to finish here and just underline once again the importance and the powerfulness of the FAO-Dimitra project to address these very acute problems in an innovative and participatory way which will lead to solutions based on a clear understanding of the issues.

I would like to very much thank the Belgian Development Cooperation, without which the Dimitra project would not be possible, as well as the King Baudouin Foundation and all the other partners that have contributed to this initiative.



John Cornet d'Elzius
Assistant Director of the Policy Unit
of the Minister for Development Cooperation



It is both an honour and a pleasure for me to represent Minister Charles Michel at the closure of the workshop on land access organised by the FAO-Dimitra project and its partners. Dimitra is a trailblazing, innovative project in the domain of gender equality and the topic selected for the workshop is particularly important: women's access to land has always been a major problem and it remains so today. Exchanging information, communication and developing advocacy at local, national and regional levels are crucial for tackling this problem. This is all the more true given the current background of the food crisis that is devastating many countries. I will return to this point later.

The Belgian Directorate-General for Development Cooperation has been supporting the Dimitra project for several years now via its multilateral cooperation with FAO. A new four-year phase in this cooperation began this year. Between 2008 and 2011, the Belgian Development Cooperation will contribute a total of four million dollars to the Dimitra project. As I said before, Dimitra is an innovative project since it gives power and a voice to rural women's organisations by linking them up in networks, supported by new information technology or traditional local methods like rural radio stations, as well as by publications and workshops like this one. Dimitra is also a participative project as it listens to rural women and meets the needs that they have identified via a bottom-up approach. Dimitra is a unifying project, stimulating the emergence of communities of interest by exchanging information, experiences and good practices. Finally, Dimitra is a catalyst project – it strengthens its partner organisations by helping them to develop strategic advocacy with a view to influencing all development actors. At this point, I would like to congratulate the project's coordinator, Eliane Najros, and everyone involved in this inspiring project that is a source of both hope and change.

In the general policy memorandum that he submitted to the Chamber of Representatives in April 2008, Minister Charles Michel stressed once more that gender equality was a priority. He reiterated that gender equality is both a basic human right and an issue of social justice and emphasised that gender equality and work to build people's defensive, socio-cultural, political, economic and human capacities are vital for ensuring fair and sustainable development, fighting poverty and food insecurity, guaranteeing lasting peace and achieving all of the Millennium Development Goals. Women's rights, particularly their status and the respect of their rights, therefore lie at the very core of the Minister's policy and also tie in with the main concerns of the Dimitra project.

The Belgian Development Cooperation is therefore determined to accelerate progress in the domain of gender equality by supporting its partners' efforts. With this in mind, it has developed a gender mainstreaming strategy that is complemented by funding for specific initiatives aiming to fight discrimination against women and/or promote their rights and their independence.

As far as policy is concerned, four priority areas for action have been identified:

- Sexual and reproductive health and rights, with particular attention to preventing and fighting HIV/AIDS;
- The implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, with a focus on aspects linked to combating sexual violence and impunity;
- Education for girls and training for women;
- Involvement of women in economic development.

All of these priority areas are very similar to those debated in Dimitra's workshops at local, national and regional level, meaning that Dimitra is making an active contribution to implementing this policy and that, thanks to Dimitra, we and other donors can benefit from experiences and good practices from the field.

As I mentioned before, the topic chosen for this workshop is vitally important in the framework of the debates on responding to the food crisis. Indeed, we should bear in mind that women produce 60 to 70% of food in most developing countries and that they are responsible for half of world food production. Women's key role



as producers and providers of supplies and their essential contribution to food security should therefore be given our full attention and emphasised very strongly.

Over the past few months, rapidly climbing food prices have placed the issues of hunger and food security at the top of the international agenda. According to estimates, over 100 million people are currently at risk of not having enough food, in addition to the 860 million who already suffer chronic food insecurity.

In this specific context, a human rights based approach is essential and it is crucial that women have equal access to land (and all of its elements, including wood, water and sub-soil), credit, inputs and services. It is now more urgent than ever that the causes of gender inequality – and more specifically, gender inequality linked to land access – are identified clearly and that appropriate strategies are defined to fight them.

I am convinced that this workshop has made an important contribution to finding solutions at local, national and even international level.

The key role of agriculture, especially the food-producing crops in whose production women play a major part, was stressed at FAO's recent Food Summit.

Minister Charles Michel advocated increased investment in agriculture, a sector that has been neglected in recent years. He pledged to allocate 10% of Belgium's official development assistance to agriculture by 2010 and to increasing this to 15% by 2015. He also encouraged the international community to make the same commitment. Furthermore, he lobbied for a gradual increase in the purchase of local food products by the World Food Programme (WFP) and other national, regional and international institutions. Belgium is therefore dedicated to working to promote self-sufficiency and food security in Africa, the continent that has been hardest hit by the food crisis and will certainly suffer the most from the effects of climate change. To implement this commitment, we need to define a course of action, both qualitative and quantitative, in which gender equality and women's independence must play an important role if we are to achieve the expected results.

In this context, it is clear that exchanging knowledge, experiences and expertise on such important themes as land access – themes at the very heart of the Dimitra project – are essential factors and must be taken into account.

On behalf of the Minister, I would like once more to congratulate the Dimitra project, all of its partners and their representatives on both their continued efforts to promote gender equality and their working methods. I would also like to congratulate the Brussels and FAO teams for their commitment and dynamism, and finally the King Baudouin Foundation, which has supported the Dimitra project since its inception.

I will most certainly inform the Minister of the workshop's conclusions and recommendations and I can assure you that they will be taken on board, in accordance with their true value.

