
Women's Voices

“Mr. Chairman, Honourable Delegates;

We, women representatives from different organisations in Africa, representing farmer's, Community Based Organisations, Landless Peoples Movements, Pastoralists and Youth, from Western, Southern and Eastern Africa, meeting in Nairobi from June 16-18, 2008, to share our diverse experiences on women's access, control and ownership of land/natural and productive resources in Africa and governments' extent of implementation of the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD) Declaration in Africa and the current food crisis.

It is widely acknowledged that improved women's access, control and ownership of land/natural and productive resources, is a key factor in eradicating hunger and rural poverty. This has been restated in the framework of international commitments at World Food Summit 1996 and its Plan of Action; in the Voluntary Guidelines on the Implementation of the Right to Food unanimously adopted by FAO Council; and most recently at the FAO's 32nd Committee on Food Security in October 2006. However there has not been a concerted international action to address the question of women's access, control and ownership of land/natural and productive resources in Africa.

“The overall situation is that in the face of increased competition and conflict over land rights for mining, development, logging and other economic activities and as a result of trends towards market-based land reforms, and environmental and health disasters, African women are fast losing their already precarious access to land and resources. HIV-positive women or widows and children orphaned by HIV and AIDS risk losing all claims to family land and natural resources”, notes Annette Mukiga from Rwanda Women's Network.

We note that the world is in a food crisis that is linked to a record increase in prices of 83% -a situation not seen in the last fifty (50) years. For years, African governments, advised by international financial institutions and donors, have dismantled public support to agriculture and neglected the small farmers, particularly women farmers, who feed their people.

As Isabella Wandati of Butere Focus on Women's Development, Kenya, notes, “The targets and goals to eradicate hunger and achieve food security will not be attained unless governments and international organisations take specific action to end the persistent discrimination against women in matters of access to, ownership and control over land and natural resources in Africa. Because women produce up to 80% of the food in developing countries, yet now comprise 60% of those suffering from hunger”.

We are cognisant of the fact that the ICARRD Declaration in Africa will be implemented through the African Union's (AU), United Nation's Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the Africa Development Bank (ADB) led Africa Land Policy and Land Reform Framework and Guidelines currently being developed to: ensure secure land rights; increase productivity; improve livelihoods; enhance natural resource management, and; contribute to a broad-based economic growth.

As Fatou Bah from the National Youth Association for Food Security in The Gambia points out:

“Improved women’s access, control and ownership of land/natural and productive resources are key to the achievements of these aims. The process and content of the above Africa Framework and Guidelines must fully adhere to African governments commitments in the ICARRD Declaration 2006 and the African Union’s Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa 2003 on women’s rights to land and natural resources to realize its aims”.

Recommendations:

1. To FAO and African Governments on implementation of ICARRD to implement existing commitments as part of the follow up to the ICARRD Declaration March 2006 at continental, regional and national levels through concrete measures:

Uphold equal citizenship rights for both women and men by eliminating all discriminatory cultural, religious and traditional laws on succession and inheritance included in statutory law at national level that exclude African women from citizenship on an equal footing with African men, as a first step to ensuring women’s access, control and ownership of land/natural and productive resources in Africa;

Support the establishment of a reporting, monitoring and evaluation mechanism for member states managed collaboratively by FAO, the African Union and regional economic communities regarding the implementation of ICARRD follow up;

Fund agrarian reform and agricultural development through the development of long-term strategies linking all concerned ministries at national level-Agriculture, Land, Environment, Livestock and Natural Resources;

Support establishment of gender disaggregated data-base, at national, regional and continental levels, to measure the ICARRD Declaration’s implementation progress in order to inform policies, programmes and processes for women’s access, control and ownership of land/natural and productive resources in Africa.

2. To FAO and African Governments to implement the measures below in the implementation of ICARRD in Africa through the African Land Policy and Land Reform Framework and Guidelines:

Convene a continental round table on women’s access, control and ownership of land/natural and productive resources in Africa in 2008 to develop indicators and benchmarks for the AU Land Framework and Guidelines before their adoption by the AU Heads of States Summit in 2009. Problems of women’s access, control and ownership of land/natural and productive resources in Africa are in many national contexts complex and sensitive issues. There is a need for policy makers and governments and civil society (particularly organisations of rural women farmers) in Africa to come together to assess the extent of the challenges and share possible ways forward at the sub-regional level and resolve collective action;

Mainstream women’s rights in the Draft AU Land Framework and Guidelines. Women’s access, control and ownership over land/natural and productive resources need to be treated comprehensively in each of the aspects of the land question in line with government commitments on women’s rights including the ICARRD Declaration 2006 and the African Union’s Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa 2003.

Conclusion

Women's access, control and ownership of land/natural and productive resources in Africa intersect with other problems such as discriminatory inheritance patterns, agriculture and food insecurity, violence against women, the appropriation and privatization of communal and indigenous lands and other natural resources, as well as gendered control over economic resources and the right to work. This inter-sectionality highlights the need for governments to secure women's rights to access, control and own land/natural and productive resources, in order to lessen the threat of discrimination, different forms of violence and HIV/AIDS, denial of political participation, and other violations of their economic and human rights. There is also need to ensure gender responsive land and environmental law to facilitate women's access to resources. The measures we have recommended above will be key to securing those rights."

African Women's Statement on Land/Natural and Productive Resources,

25th FAO African Regional Conference (ARC). June 16-20, 2008, Nairobi, Kenya.

Signed by Coast Women's Rights (COWER), Kenya; Rwanda Women's Network(RWN), Rwanda; Plateforme Sous Regionale Des Organisations Paysannes D'Afrique Central (PROPAC), Cameroon; National Youth Association for Food Security (NYAFS)/IFSN, The Gambia; Kenya Food Security Network (KEFOSPAN), Kenya; Kenya Land Alliance (KLA); Eastern African Farmers Federation(EAFF), Tanzania; National Women's Farmers Association (NAWFA), The Gambia; Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA), Ethiopia; Uganda Land Alliance (ULA), Uganda; Community Land and Development Foundation (COLANDEF), Ghana; La Via Campesina, South Africa; Network of Organisations Working on Food Sovereignty (ROSA), Mozambique; Eastern and Southern Africa Small Scale Farmers Forum(ESAFF), Zambia; Shelter Forum, Kenya; Food Rights Alliance-Uganda; Volunteer Efforts for Development Concerns, Uganda; ACORD International ActionAid International.