

III World Congress of Rural Women October 2-4, 2002

Summary Report: Colleen Ross Weatherhead, NFU Delegate

Rural Women in the Global Village:

- Hunger and poverty are indivisible. On a global scale, women represent 50% of rural/agricultural work force, therefore maintain significant control in the battle for food security, yet women continue to carry the heavier load in many developing as well as "western" countries. In most developing nations, such as those in Africa and Asia, women represent up to 90% of the agricultural work force. This is not to be confused with actual land ownership.
- Trade liberalization policies favour economies of scale, export cash cropping over local sustainable agriculture.

Gender, Sustainable Development and Food Security:

- Many rural women continue to be the primary care givers as well as supporting the family in farming activities. Raising the family and raising the crops and livestock go hand-in-hand. In many countries their work is not recognized socially or statistically. It could therefore be termed invisible work.
- Focus on FAO and Rural Women Policy- "food for all" www.fao.org refer to Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD), Telefood, SEAGA, DIMITRA.
- Women play a very important role in the conservation of plant species conservation, food security and the sustainable use of resources.
- Investing in rural women is fundamentally important in the goal to alleviate poverty and social inequalities.

Workshop – Globalization, Poverty and Food Security:

- Mobilisation impacts human development, social inequity, poverty, hunger, human rights, environment and democratic governance.
- Gender impacts include: employment opportunities, access to productive assets, education and skills, domestic work, basic services.
- Access to a globalized market is what is making the difference between rich countries and poor ones more significant.
- The serious lack of resources and access to technology accentuates the inequality between rich and poor and affects women more than men, especially women living in rural environments where it is even harder to gain access to resources.
- According to Sara Hlupekile Longwe of Kenya's African Women's Development and Communications
- Network women are typically less literate, less educated and more poverty stricken.
- Women are especially negatively impacted by globalization in countries with a lower degree of human development, where such processes may intensify social inequalities between classes and ethnic groups.
- The globalization process we are experiencing today forms part of a deep-reaching transformation of world economics and politics, in which the main players are the wealthiest more developed nations. The living and working conditions of all human beings even in the remotest of rural villages is impacted.

Note: Threat of GM farm inputs was not addressed in the session on food security. Some of the delegates in this session expressed concern that this was not a featured topic.

The Role of Rural Women In Agriculture and Sustainable Rural Development:

- Women provide an essential role in the management of water, seed varieties, soil, forest preservation etc.
- Women in developing nations expressed concern for maintaining their own seed/cultivation security and expressed a desire to have their own governments take a more cautious approach before allowing the use the GM products.
- In some countries rural women face difficulties when trying to access basic resources.

Workshop – Associations and Co-operatives in the Agrifood Sectorial:

- Presenters listed examples of co-operatives within their own countries. No structure for co-operatives was presented nor were there any formulas given.

NOTE: I was able to very briefly present the work of Via Campesina and pass on the resources available through Via Campesina.

** the need for assistance in setting up and operating co-operatives was expressed by the delegates, although none was offered.*

Rural Women for World Peace and Development of People:

- It is in developing nations where women and children suffer the greatest from famine and war.
- Women are the primary care givers of AIDS orphans and those suffering with AIDS.
- In rural Africa AIDS is the number one cause of death among children and the general population.
- Delegates from Africa expressed concern that there was little to know focus on the AIDS epidemic and its impact on rural women in Africa.

WTO – Cancun 2003, Focus on:

- Fairer agricultural trade.
- Decrease in agricultural subsidies.
- Social context of growth (globalization).
- Impact of industrial style agriculture on developing countries.
- Political/agricultural/global agendas.
- Allowance of "secret test plots for GM crops" (concern expressed by Australian and African delegation).
- Impact of free-trade on less developed nations.

Overview:

- ⇒ The entire Congress was tightly controlled.
- ⇒ 56/146 speakers were from Spain, mostly government officials.
- ⇒ 43 speakers, outside of workshops.
- ⇒ Approximately 1500 delegates.
- ⇒ 162 Australian delegates, including representatives from most commodity groups, DPI, farm women's groups and media (ABC).
- ⇒ 12 Canadian delegates .
- ⇒ Honourable Mrs. Graca Machel-Mandela, Chairperson for African Community Development invited the delegates to South Africa for the next Congress. She expressed concern for the lack of real "grassroots involvement" in the process in Spain and the obvious lack of grassroots participation.

- ⇒ Australian delegation expressed concern over the obvious control and move away from grassroots involvement.
- ⇒ Canadian delegation agreed to participate actively in the planning of the 2006 Congress and was invited to participate in all stages of planning.

RURAL WOMEN MUST ACTIVELY SUPPORT EACH OTHER ON A LOCAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVEL, FOR SUSTENANCE OF BASIC HUMAN NEEDS AND HUMAN RIGHTS. THE ROLE OF RURAL WOMEN IS DIFFERENT TO THAT OF MEN AND NO LESS MEANINGFUL. FOR THIS REASON, WOMEN MUST BE INVOLVED IN ALL DECISION MAKING PROCESSES WHICH WILL ULTIMATELY INFLUENCE THEIR WELL-BEING AND THAT OF THEIR FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES AND COUNTRIES.