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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: “The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges”

Statement submitted by World Mission Foundation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

Statement

World Mission Foundation welcomes the theme of the fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, “The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges”. World Mission Foundation is a global service provider and HIV/AIDS and social needs policy advocate for Africans and people of African descent.

In 1980, a United Nations report stated that women constitute half the world’s population, perform nearly two thirds of work hours, receive one tenth of the world’s income and own less than one hundredth of a per cent of the world’s property. Women have always been subjected to discrimination and have suffered and are suffering discrimination in silence. Self-sacrifice and self-denial add to their nobility and fortitude, yet they have been subjected to all inequities, indignities, inequality and discrimination. The rural women of Africa and women of African descent form part of this population and face more challenges in all facets of life.

The theme of the session encompasses several issues involving rural women, such as empowerment, poverty, the eradication of hunger, rural development, self-development, national development and prevailing challenges.

This year’s theme consolidates several strengths of the United Nations in ensuring that the promotion of gender equality reaches all sectors of women. The theme again portrays the global interests of the United Nations in recognizing women as a part of the successes of the Millennium Development Goals. This extends to the resolution on the approval of an entity for women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), in 2010.

World Mission Foundation recognizes that rural women of African descent are a group of global women capable of achieving great things in terms of increasing the food supply and protecting natural resources.

World Mission Foundation recognizes that empowerment of women in all spheres of life is critical to addressing the issues of poverty and hunger, national and global development, overcoming current challenges, addressing obstacles to the advancement of women and reaching a global outcome on policy affecting women.

World Mission Foundation wishes to acknowledge the importance of global cooperation in the field of women and has made frantic efforts to participate actively on global forums in addressing issues relating to women of African descent. World Mission Foundation has taken steps to disseminate information, resources and materials in its efforts to empower women of African descent on health and HIV/AIDS, providing education on maternal mortality reduction and providing microcredit services to rural women to support the acquisition of economic skills.

Empowering African rural women and women of African descent spurs economic and social growth leading to transformational changes in family, personal and rural economy as well as the creation of support services for overcoming hunger. Rural women are provided with skills, education and the most fundamental elements of entrepreneurship to enable them to reduce their poverty levels — and that of their families — and eradicate hunger.

Health, education and human rights are central to development and these rural women, who are the drivers of rural and family development, lack knowledge or

access to these fundamental elements. The negative impact of this is felt most directly by their inability to be part of the decisions affecting women at the individual, community and national levels. These women are also denied their rights, including rights to property and children, which affects productivity and sustainable economic and social development. It is clear that rural women hold the key to fully realizing the productive potential of petty trading, farming, creating local crafts, weaving, and local hair dressing, sewing and midwifery, yet find it most difficult to overcome poverty and eradicate hunger.

Rural communities of people of African descent are predominantly poor. The high level of poverty mandates that rural women subject themselves to heavy work burdens, thereby facing greater pressure in challenges ranging from those of the family to those of national development. This increases rural struggles with an unending cycle of poverty, increasing the real risk of more rural women and their families facing more serious poverty. Interventions to improve and empower rural women of African descent must include a life cycle approach that can encompass and contribute to good economics, education, health and reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, nutrition and human rights. These elements are regarded as strong weapons in empowering rural women in decision-making and participation in women's issues throughout their lives.

Empowerment interventions:

1. Offering rural women an opportunity to realize their potential to participate in their policy and advocacy issues will not only yield economic and social benefits but also contribute immensely to hunger eradication, overcoming hunger and equipping women to face current challenges. Rural women can be effective leaders and policy advocates in their communities, serving as productive entrepreneurs and workers. They can contribute to community and rural development and change the faces of their rural communities.
2. Rural women are highly diverse and require differentiated solutions. Recognizing this fact will facilitate an effective approach to reach rural women with meticulously designed interventions designed to target these rural women, even those living in the developing world.
3. Efforts to unlock the potential of rural women must be pursued in partnership with men and not in competition with them.
4. Expand opportunities for rural women to acquire literacy education as a vital component of improving their lives as well as eradicating hunger and poverty. There is no tool to spur development and eradicate poverty and hunger among rural women other than education.
5. Equip rural women to be entrepreneurs, workers and managers of the rural economy, incorporating knowledge and skill-building programmes into rural economic development initiatives and education in an effort to create opportunities to start small businesses or improve output. This will ease the heavy work burden while providing the learning they need to succeed in meeting current challenges.
6. Empower rural women to become non-traditional extension agents to their families and communities by providing critical information and resources and offering innovation incentives as well as support services.

7. Provide partnerships with foundations and organizations that could mentor these women in matters regarding women's rights policies and legal frameworks, and could publish and distribute these laws as well as help women advocate for legal, political and social change.

8. Prepare rural women to be major stakeholders in women's issues and natural resource management through inclusion in rural investment planning and credit and financial services, and support efforts to promote equitable inheritance and land rights.

Lastly, World Mission Foundation agrees with and supports the aims of the United Nations, through UN-Women, in advocating for accessible and empowering tools that will enable rural women's participation in national and global issues and for targeted action that will address inherent inequalities. World Mission Foundation is continuing its work on education, health and HIV/AIDS empowerment programmes for African women and women of African descent with the provision of microcredit services to small-scale businesses.

We thank UN-Women and the Commission on the Status of Women for all they have done and are doing to promote greater empowerment, opportunity, protection and equality for rural women, and World Mission Foundation stands ready to assist with these efforts.
