



STATEMENT

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THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES,
LANDLOCKED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES
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AT THE

**IFAD LUNCHEON ON:
“RURAL WOMEN’S ACCESS TO LAND AND PROPERTY”**

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Colleagues,

It is a great pleasure indeed to be here with you to participate in this luncheon event on Women Access to Land and Property. I would like also to thank the organizers of this event.

The issues of gender disparity and women empowerment are very critical and especially important in achieving most of the Millennium Development Goals in the Least Developed Countries as well as the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action “entails developing human, financial and institutional resources and creating and enabling domestic and global environment. The Brussels Declaration and Programme of Action for LDCs and the UN Secretary-General’s report that recognize the mutually reinforcing links between gender equality and poverty reduction and the need to tackle disparities between women and men in the fight against poverty.

In this context, one of the major global challenges of the new millennium is growing rural poverty among women in the least developed countries. Women face gender-based discrimination, which is reflected in their lack of control over resources, in particular land, technology and social services; lack of special

knowledge and lack of full exercising of their human rights. Unequal patterns of ownership between men and women contribute significantly to this condition. Women, just like men, need land as a means of livelihood especially in a global market economy. In fact, less than 1% of the world's landed property is owned by women. At the same time, it is estimated that 25% of the world's households are headed by women and sometimes exceed 50%, for instance in Latin America and Africa. Thus, these women represent a high proportion of those in informal settlements among the poorest countries. Despite international agreements and commitments, not much has been done and there is still a lot to be done to achieve more equitable access to land and property, ownership, control and management, which is very crucial for LDCs to develop in sustainable way.

Consequently, the situation as to unequal access to land and property is exacerbated by the unregulated legal and traditional structures on land and property rights. Many countries have a constitution that gives equal rights to men and women but usually with dual legal systems with one general law and one customary law. Often customary laws take over general laws and issues such as inheritance, property laws and practices are sources of serious discrimination against women. Comparatively few least developed

African countries have legislation in place to assure women's access to land and property. Those include: Burkina Faso, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. Eritrea and Ethiopia lack of specific law, but there are not many obstacles for women to own land. In Sudan and Zambia, customary law does not allow women to own land and in fact very few do. In other least developed countries, customary law violates women's right to inherit or limit women's access to land. For instance, in Uganda both widow and widower are entitled to 15% of the property of the deceased spouse, but in reality a widower usually gets the whole estate.

It is critical to ensure equal women's access to land and its resources in many LDCs where most of the population lives in rural areas as in Cambodia (85%) and in Tanzania (80%), majority of which are women. Women in LDCS are significantly involved in cultivating land, their livelihood, social and economic activities in rural areas depend on land and land resources. Their responsibilities include all aspects of crop and food production. In Tanzania, the agricultural sector employs around 90% of the country's foreign exchange, where 75% of women are actively engaged in agricultural production. In Nepal, women play

predominant roles in the subsistence-based farming systems on which 90% of the population relies.

Although women contribute a lot to almost all agricultural production processes and play a major role in food production, they again do not have a direct access to natural resources and such key inputs as credit, agricultural inputs, education and other services. In current globalizing world, where the land becomes capital, women further experience disadvantage in getting access to credit and micro-financing. Without land title deeds, women find it hard to get financing. Lack of rights to tenure renders many women unable to protect themselves. Moreover, their low educational level discourages them from requesting banks to finance them and places modern techniques for developing the land beyond their reach. To deal with the problem, innovative plans to raise money and access to financing of women projects should be developed by national governments with the help of international organizations.

To this end, there is an urgent need in contributing significantly to the process of advancement in women's economic activity through guaranteeing their rights to land, enhancing their role in decision-making and community affairs. Building capacity

of women to access land, credit, education and information will improve economic conditions of societies, facilitate women's empowerment and contribute to family and household well-being in the most vulnerable countries.

As the matter of conclusion, we have to take every step to ensure equal access of women to land and property at the national level in the least developed countries. With these words, I would like to commence our deliberations and thank you again for your participation at this event.