



# PRESS RELEASE



UN OFFICE OF THE HIGH REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES,  
LANDLOCKED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AND SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

**UNITED NATIONS UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL**  
**CALLS FOR INCREASED ACCESS TO LAND AND PROPERTY TO RURAL WOMEN**  
**IN LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES**

**ENSURE WOMEN EQUAL ACCESS TO LAND AND ITS RESOURCES AS A MEASURE OF**  
**EMPOWERING WOMEN IN RURAL COMMUNITIES**

**United Nations, 9 March 2005:** At a Roundtable Beijing + 10 Meeting to discuss the issue of women facing discrimination in access to land and property in rural communities, specially in Least Developed Countries, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, Anwarul K. Chowdhury called for increased access to land, property and water to women in rural areas.

“Empowering women is the key, if progress is to be made. It is estimated that 25% of the world’s households are headed by women and sometimes exceed 50%, particularly in Latin America and Africa. Yet, less than 1% of the world’s landed property is owned by women,” he said at the United Nations today. The meeting was organized by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Introducing the issues facing women in rural areas, the Assistant President of IFAD, Phrang Roy said that three quarters of the world’s extremely poor people, more than 800 million people, live in rural areas of the developing world. The majority of these rural poor people are women.

“It is crucial to put rural women’s needs and priorities at the centre of poverty reduction strategies if real progress is to be made,” he added.

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Mr. Roy said that promoting women's transformational role is central to reducing poverty. "For rural poor women to be able to take part in income-generating activities and decision-making, they must have access to essential services and infrastructure."

The United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Rachel Mayanja called for the elimination of discrimination against women. "Land and property taken away from women in rural communities, creates a reversed trend towards development. Outlining ways of empowering women in rural areas, Ms Mayanja recommended continuing efforts at strengthening the rule of law in order for women to get increased access to land and property. "Without land ownership, women cannot get credit, without credit they cannot earn an income. Consequently, their chance of breaking out of poverty is considerably diminished" she lamented.

Referring to the situation of women in Least Developed Countries, Mr. Chowdhury said, "Women in the rural areas of several least developed countries have access to land and property, but this access is often circumvented by customary or traditional law. There is a lack of good legal basis for women to get access to land and property."

Mr. Chowdhury said that if women in rural communities are not developed, if educational opportunities are denied to girls, development will be stunted. "To contribute to the economic and social development in the rural areas of least developed countries and to enable women to know their rights, education is a priority," he emphasized.

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