

Role of Women in Agriculture Observed at Annual 'IICA Day' Function at the OAS

'IICA holds firm that small farmers and women farmers hold the key to meeting the growing demand for affordable, adequate and nutritious food.' – David C. Hatch



Washington D.C. November 18, 2010 – Before a joint Session of the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Permanent Executive Committee of the Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CEPCIDI), a panel including four women with varied experiences in agriculture development highlighted the challenges and successful experiences encountered along the way.

Earlier this year, the OAS inaugurated the *Inter-American Year of Women*. This year's 'IICA Day,' entitled, *Women in Agriculture – The Contribution of Women to Agriculture and Food Security in the Americas,* was held to complement an International Forum on the role of women in agriculture development held at the headquarters of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) earlier this year in Costa Rica.

Chairman of the Permanent Council, Permanent Representative of El Salvador to the OAS, Ambassador Joaquin Maza opened the Session underscoring that the crisis in food prices in 2008 drew attention to the fragility of the agrifood system and ultimately sparked debate about the need to create a 'new vision for agriculture.' Maza also remarked that it is widely recognized that rural women produce between 60% and 80% of the food consumed in developing countries.

IICA representative in the United States, David C. Hatch recognized the roles of government. He said, "By supporting agricultural production, governments are fulfilling one of their main duties: guaranteeing the food security and sustainability of their populations." Hatch also underscored the critical need to strengthen access to credit, education, labor markets, land ownership, access to affordable credit, technology, technical assistance and training.

According to Audrey Marks, Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the OAS and career entrepreneur, it is an exciting time to be a woman in agriculture development. She said, "The empowerment of women is central to raising levels of nutrition, improving production and distribution of food and agricultural products, and enhancing the living condition of rural populations." Marks also emphasized the growing trend of diversification in the agricultural sector, recognizing opportunities in non-traditional sub sectors, including green house production and fisheries. Additionally, in Jamaica, efforts are underway to increase the value-added component of agriculture, in order to create more forward linkages to ensure profitability.

Ambassador Carmen Moreno, Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Commission of Women, focused on the need for increased recognition and support of the power of rural women. "This power is one the basic pillars for the eradication of poverty and an axis in transferring knowledge and education to new generations," she said. Moreno also highlighted that while the proportion of rural women has declined in recent decades- primarily as a result of rural-urban migration- the proportion of workers employed and direct production has increased during these periods.

Petronila Morales Calgua, Vice president of the Rural Business Trade Association (AGER) in Guatemala suggested that more emphasis be placed on improving overall conditions for women in development in general. She said, "Governments, national and international institutions must have 'budgets with gender equity' built into them in order to rightly focus on growth and advancement." Morales also called for the strengthening of women's organization at the local levels and in the communities and for governments to address the impact of climate change on agriculture production.

Director General of the Organization from the Rehabilitation of the Environment, Monique Pierre Finnigan, provided a brief update of the agriculture sector in Haiti and factors impacting the sector. She said, "In a report published in May 2010 and prepared by MARNDR in collaboration with FAO and IICA, after the earthquake, Haiti's agriculture sector is dominated by extreme poverty of farmers and 88% of the rural population live in poverty - life is hard." According to Finnigan, during the last 20 years, the role of government has been drastically reduced resulting in the weakening of research programs and regulation of the sector. Finnigan would like to see 'increased access to economic infrastructure, access to loans, healthcare, water, increased protection for women in general and overall improved conditions for women.'

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ABOUT IICA

The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture is the specialized agency for agriculture and the rural milieu of the Inter-American System, whose purpose is to provide innovative technical cooperation to the Member States, with a view to achieving their sustainable development in aid of the peoples of the Americas.

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Additional information
alondon@iicawash.org

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*IICA Office in the United States ♦1889 F Street, NW, Suite 360 ♦Washington, DC 20006
Phone (202)458-3767 ♦Fax (202)458-6335
www.iica.int/usa*