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Statement submitted by International Federation of Agricultural Producers, 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 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2011/100.

Statement*

There has been tremendous progress towards universal primary education during the past decade, especially in developing countries. However, limited access to education, high drop-out rates and grade repetition, and poor quality of education, remain important challenges to the full achievement of this goal. At least 72 million children of school age are still denied the right to education due to financial, social or other challenges, including rural life in developing countries. Food is a daily necessity, but sadly many of the people who toil to produce it live in poverty. It is estimated that one half of the world's poor are smallholder farmers. Their access to education is impeded by poverty and lack of rural infrastructure. Breaking the poverty cycle farmers face is dependent upon their access to: (a) invaluable ongoing training on agricultural production; (b) solutions geared specifically to rural women; and (c) agricultural training for rural orphans and vulnerable children.

Agricultural extension

Extension systems are the networks of local experts that work with farmers to transfer scientific expertise, agronomic techniques, and best practices. Unfortunately, they have been decimated over the past three decades. Support is needed for regional and national extension systems to educate farmers. Mobilization of the scientific, donor, business, NGO, and farmer communities are also needed to regain lost ground.

Providing this education to rural communities in a systematic, participatory manner is essential to improving their production, income and quality of life. A century ago, extension services were focused on the dissemination of useful and practical information related to agriculture, including correct use of improved seeds, fertilizers, implements, tillage practices and livestock management. Today, that vision has expanded to include the steps in productive agricultural, marketing techniques, and basic business skills to address poverty. It should also include basic health, nutrition, and domestic information for the benefit of the rural household.

Plus, the extension service facilitates the sharing of traditional and local knowledge. Modern extension services must increase their capacity for two-way information-sharing — between experts in research and farmers themselves who have essential information on farming. Agricultural research remains an academic endeavour unless it is focused on real problems on the ground and efforts are made to deliver solutions to farmers in a manner that is useful to them. Research and extension should be functionally linked and there should be pluralism in the approaches to implementing this form of education. The ability of farmers to manage risk has resilience to climate change, and to break the poverty cycle relies on knowledge. Extension is also an essential pillar for rural community progress including support for the organizational capacity of farmers' groups and the formation of cooperatives. Equally importantly, the improvement of the economic capacity of farmers provides a considerable improvement in the access of rural children to education.

* The present statement is being issued without formal editing.

Rural women in developing countries

Education programmes should make specific reference to the needs of women, including rural women. There is a pressing need for general education for women in developing countries. Education for women has lagged behind in many countries, and there is evidence that literacy rates for rural women are even lower than their urban counterparts. For instance, in Bangladesh, the adult literacy rate for rural women is only 36.2 per cent, compared with 60.0 per cent for urban women, and 56.1 per cent for rural men compared with 75.4 per cent for urban men.

As is well captured in the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations study on rural women and food security in Asia, the impacts of poor access to education for women are manifold and undoubtedly not restricted to Asia. Poorly educated rural women are more likely to encounter the adverse effects of structural changes in the economy, particularly in an agriculture sector oriented towards the competitive global market, but they are less likely to be able to respond positively. Prevailing shortfalls in rural female literacy achievement, coupled with trends towards the feminization of farming, underline the urgency for taking action to improve the skills and knowledge of rural women as a means to advance their technological and economic empowerment. National actions to empower women with education will be investments in human capital for agriculture and rural development with consequent positive outcomes for household and national food security. Multiple studies have also found women's education plays a positive role in achieving goals for child schooling and nutrition.

Women need an education to participate fully and successfully in farming. Agriculture is fundamentally knowledge based to achieve good production, and basic business skills are required to sell grain and manage household income. Women who lack access to basic education are likely to be excluded from new opportunities and their families will lag behind.

It is important to have gender-sensitive approaches to increase access to literacy, basic math skills, and agricultural extension services. Specific training with mechanisms to manage gender-based biases on access to land, microcredit, and marketing opportunities are needed to close gaps for rural women and avoid perpetuating long-term gender inequities.

Orphans and vulnerable children in developing countries

Educational goals for orphans and vulnerable children in developing countries should be assessed at a national level. In many developing countries, agriculture can be the primary means of employment for the vast majority of the population. When the family unit is disrupted, many of these children lose their opportunity to learn basic farming skills. Generally, in developing countries, children learn at their parents' side in the field about the rhythms of when to plant, harvest, and rotate crops. Extra efforts should be made in rural areas to provide essential training on agricultural skills. These should be integrated into the programme for basic educational skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Capacity to teach math skills in the context of crop marketing is significant and provides real life examples which will have relevance in life development. In most cases, farming skills will be essential to future income, employment, and food security as young people grow up in developing countries. Training on nutrition and gardening is relevant to children, even in an urban setting. Efforts to train basic skills on "bag" gardens can provide

vital nutrients regardless of access to land, and all children should know about a good diet. For all children, increase in productive capacity of smallholder farms can help free time, unpaid labour needs, and tuition funds to further childhood education.
