



PERMANENT MISSION OF FINLAND TO THE UNITED NATIONS
866 UN PLAZA, SUITE 222, NEW YORK, NY 10017 - TEL. 1-212-355-2100 - FAX 1-212-759-6156

STATEMENT BY

H.E. Ms. Tarja Reponen
Ambassador for Sustainable Development

Gender inequality - A constraint to economic growth, biodiversity protection, poverty reduction and sustainable development: Linkages between MDG 1, 3, and 7

United Nations, New York
21 September, 2010

Check against delivery

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world population is expected to surpass 9 billion in 2050. It is estimated that agricultural output will have to increase by 70 percent between now and then to meet the food requirements of the entire population. The question is: How are we going to deal with this? Already currently two billion people live in dry regions, where economic and social conditions are extremely harsh.

Coming from a country where nature is close to everyone and the loss of biodiversity could be a national catastrophe, I would like to share with you some ideas of how poverty, gender and sustainable development are related to one another.

The experience from Finland could be of some use. Throughout history, our country has been a battlefield for neighboring nations where men were soldiers, hunters and traders but women had the keys to the households. They took their position in running farms in the woods, they learnt to harvest crops and prepare the ingredients for food just as many women today do all around the world, especially in poor rural areas. In Finland, the capacity and wit of women was fully utilized for the purpose of societal and economic development. For women, new challenges meant also new requests for education, independence and full political rights. This later materialized in economic rights (i.e. legislation on inheritance and ownership of land) and rights of choosing one's profession freely, be it in agriculture, forestry, law, biotechnology or research.

This implies that women's capacity and knowledge should be put to full use.

Women have a major role in food producing agriculture as well as in providing nutrition for the family. For example in Africa, 60 to 80 per cent of food is produced by women. Also in Asia women carry the main responsibility for the food producing agriculture. Women are also responsible for fetching water and fuel wood for household consumption – they are the ones who see the rivers, lakes and forests every day. We are going to need good agricultural practices as well as comprehensive and climate sensitive and biodiversity protecting land use plans that take into consideration land ownership and use rights.

Food security in developing countries is most vulnerable among the small-scale farmers. In Sub Saharan Africa some 80% of farms are smaller than two hectares and most of these farmers are women. If the nutritional status of women and small children is enhanced, the positive impacts will reflect on the whole nation as building capacities in learning, health and social sectors among other ones.

Women as well as men need to be able to make informed decisions to cope with challenges posed by hunger and poverty. The educational system that has been available for girls and boys since the mid 19th century has been a key to Finland's thrive out of poverty. In addition to the equal educational system, Finland would like to stress the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights. The MDG report shows that these issues have been seriously underfunded at the same time when we have solemnly pledged to alleviate these problems. This has a direct impact on ecological and economic development. Finland has annually increased its support to UNFPA and also supports other organisations that deal with sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Finland has also identified gender and climate change as its focus area because we believe that it will not be enough if only one half of the world's population is able to take care of this huge problem. Finland stresses that it is only possible to achieve the set targets if the knowledge and views of both women and men are included and if both women and men are committed to the goals. For example, we have to discuss and agree what we mean by green economy and low-carbon growth. We have to think what the co-benefits of green economy are in reduced pollution and health impacts, better access to energy, income generation, enhanced climate resilience, cost-saving and empowerment of women.

The President of Finland, Ms Tarja Halonen, made a promise in the Copenhagen Climate meetings last December to work towards facilitating the integration of gender perspectives in National Adaptation Plans and in their implementation as well as to continue funding female delegates to climate meetings and to promote such forestry and other natural resource activities that enhance better gender equality. We have been happy to carry out this work together with the Global Gender and Climate Alliance represented by UNEP, IUCN, UNDP and WEDO, and look forward to collaborating with the Alliance also in the future.

We need to make sure that the vast sums of money that are linked to climate change benefit also women and especially women in developing countries. We need mechanisms to ensure that women take part in deciding on these funds and that all, both women and men, are aware of the impacts of climate change or biodiversity loss on women's lives. Furthermore we need to be aware of the knowledge and information women all around the world have about our environment – and of the possibilities to use this information to cope with the challenges we are facing.

Finland has hosted several international meetings with an intention to find ways to enhance synergies in the implementation of the CBD and FCCC. Finland has supported the gender plan of action. The work that has taken place so far is a good start—but just that. We need to systematically continue ensuring that gender aspects and recognition of women's role will appear in the final text of the

climate agreement that will hopefully be adopted in Mexico at the end of this year.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the environment is very much a woman's issue. Women need to participate actively in discussions concerning environment. Finland is committed to working towards gender-equal environmental policies including biodiversity and climate policy as well as climate actions – and this can only be achieved if there are many of us who are working for it. There has never been a better time to implement gender equal environmental policies than now.