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**WORLD RURAL WOMEN'S DAY, 15 OCTOBER 2006**

**“SHARED LEADERSHIP FOR  
A BETTER TOMORROW”**

**MESSAGE FROM THE ICA GENDER EQUITY COMMITTEE**



On World Rural Women's Day, the ICA Gender Equality Committee calls on co-operators around the world to support rural women co-operators worldwide for a shared leadership of today and tomorrow.

Today we honour the 1.6 billion rural women, mainly farmers, who represent more than a quarter of the total world population. These women produce on average more than 50% of the food that is grown around world – about 80% in Africa, 60% in Asia, and between 30 and 40% in Latin America and Western countries. Women not only produce food, but they are also primarily responsible for preparing, storing and processing food. And yet, despite the fact that their significant contribution to food security and food safety is acknowledged around the globe, rural women continue to be the invisible protagonists both in developed and developing countries.

We are reminded of some disturbing facts on the situation of women on this Day:

- Women own only 2% of land, and receive only 1% of all agricultural credit.
- Only 5% of all agricultural extension resources are directed to women.
- Women represent two-thirds (66%) of all illiterate people.
- The number of rural women living in poverty has doubled since 1970.
- In rural areas the total work day is 20% longer as compared to urban areas with rural women spending an average of 20% more time than men working;

If we are to be able to respond to the challenges of poverty, hunger for a population that is ever increasing, women must be empowered to be able to be involved in finding solutions and taking decisions. The full and visible participation of women in agricultural and rural development at all levels it is not only an issue of equity and equality, but also of efficiency and sustainability.

Rural women co-operators are already playing an important role in contributing to development, peace, social cohesion, safeguarding the environment and biodiversity, but their role could be vastly enhanced in co-operatives that recognise that shared leadership can only improve the capacity of co-operatives to better serve their members. Women must be involved in their co-operatives and this involvement must include the capacity to influence and take decisions. We are reminded that the ICA Gender Strategy calls on co-operatives to strengthen institutional capacity/arrangements to promote gender equality, capacity-building of staff and membership on gender issues and strive towards gender balance of elected officials and staff.

The Gender Equality Committee calls on ICA members to support rural women in their countries and to include the gender mainstreaming in their policy, programmes and activities as well as in co-operation to development projects around the world, for a shared, balanced and more equitable leadership of today and tomorrow.

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*The ICA Gender Equality Committee promotes equality between women and men and gender integration in the co-operative movement and society. More information: [www.ica.coop/gender](http://www.ica.coop/gender)*