

30th FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean

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Alejandra Scampini – Women’s Rights Coordinator in Americas
Marta Antunes – IFSN Global Coordinator

Is FAO Technical Committee Gender Blind?

After 5 days of intensive dialogue amongst social movements and civil society organizations and networks to debate on main points to be included in the declaration of the Special Conference on Food Sovereignty organized by IPC; the FAO official conference has started.

A smaller number of social movements and civil society organizations and networks were present as observers on the first two days of the 30th FAO Regional Conference for Latin America and the Caribbean amongst the official country delegations.



Magda Reys (REDSSAG), Eduardo Vallecillo (REDCASSAN), Marta Antunes (IFSN), Idália Cordoba (GISSAN) y Alejandra Scampini (ActionAid)

Our delegation main goals for these two days were:

- To raise awareness among the delegations on the need to include gender analysis and incorporate concrete proposals derived from the women’s declaration towards the elimination of gender disparities on the struggle against hunger and poverty
- To challenge FAO alarming growing role on the promotion of biofuels as opportunities for rural development without proper attention for their impacts on the right to food.

The main discussions in the room revolved around two major issues:

1. Policies to promote and / or strengthen the participation and joint actions of public and private actors in rural development.

There was a general agreement on the importance of supporting family farming in order to reduce inequalities, hunger and poverty in the region. There was also a call to better define the typology of actors comprised in the concept of family farming. This allows the identification of the most vulnerable groups that should be the focus of public policies.

- ✓ “We need to identify typologies of family farming, analyze what is their access to economic and natural resources; we need to have differentiated policies oriented to different type of actors and families” (Ecuador)
- ✓ Regarding systems for access to food, Argentina strongly mentioned the lack of recognition of culture, social relationships and called for an inclusion of these factors.

- ✓ Venezuela mentioned the importance of looking at the rural world from a territorial development perspective engaging the community councils and with investment and services in the rural world that allow family farmers to aggregate value to their product and to send food directly to markets.
- ✓ “Fighting hunger involves biodiversity, energy and environmental issues and these are three elements that family farming has the capacity to deal with” (Laudemir Muller / representative of the Ministry of Agrarian Development in Brazil)

2. Opportunities and challenges of biofuels production for food security and the environment in Latin America and the Caribbean

During this panel, it was clear the different trends that biofuels production assumes in the region. Countries like Brazil and Argentina place biofuels as an opportunity for rural development through a vision of the agro export sector. On the other hand, some other countries demonstrated a cautious position on the subject and highlighted the need to consider the use of land to food production and food security as a priority.

What has emerged as a common issue, was the need to have more and deeper investigations to identify the potentials and the risks of biofuels so that adequate policies are implemented in the countries.



Plenary session during the FAO Regional Conference

- ✓ “Biofuels are too risky. We are open but within the premise that the most important is to Assure food security” (Bolivia)
- ✓ “We recognize that there is a need for energy and that having an alternative is very important. Nevertheless, considering food security and food sovereignty, we are actually obliged to think in other alternatives of production. The development of biofuels crops can generate effects on the increase of inputs prices, promotion of GMOs seeds and effects on local production and economy. We said that family farming is the base of food production. Therefore, this situation is very delicate and we need to consider well planned solutions that will not go against the poorest” (Venezuela)
- ✓ “We recognize that biofuels are an important issue. But if we want a hunger free Latin America, we need to consider the framework of food and nutritional security and sovereignty. The priority is food security and sovereignty” (Nicaragua)
- ✓ “We need to question the pattern of energy consumption and think about saving energy in order to avoid impacts in the environment and food security. One of the risks of biofuels production is the competition for access to water and natural resources” (Cuba)

As the impacts of biofuels discussions were still in the room, the Chair of the Technical Committee called for a last round of discussions on “Other Issues”

The minister of Ecuador used this space – there was no other space! – to ask for the inclusion of gender analysis in these discussions.



Ecuador Head of Delegation receiving material on women and land tenure and the right to food framework from ActionAid

“It is a shock that the members of the round tables during the panels today were all men, only the rapporteur is a woman. That reflects also what we are always asked to do. We need to call our attention on how the gender architecture is being weakened in several institutions, UN agencies and Governments structures. I hope we do a housekeeping here on this.”

The Right to Food: Some countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, and Mexico, highlighted the importance to legislate on the right to food and to agree on calendar, goals and targets.

Observers Interventions:

- ✓ IPC and FIAN re-called Jean Ziegler request for and international moratorium on all kinds of incentives to the production and trade of agro fuels.
- ✓ **ActionAid** made its declaration recovering the experience of Guatemala where 27 communities have disappeared as a consequence of land concentration for biofuels production and where 14 peasant communities in Costa Sur are struggling for drinking water due its use and contamination in the production of biofuels.
- ✓ **ActionAid** also recalled the women’s declaration that stated that agrofuels and monoculture can not be considered as opportunities for rural development or to fight poverty. On the contrary, agribusiness and agrofuels plantations are real threats to the right to food. In this context, peasant women are the more affected and the ones that need to face daily effects of this economic and productive tendency.
- ✓ Thus, we claimed:
 - An equitable way to address women’s demands for land and productive means
 - non discriminatory policies of social security, credit and services for women that allow them to maintain their land
 - the adoption of non discriminatory policy of social security, credit and services for women
 - the recognition of women as right holders and social and economical actors



Laura Hurtado from ActionAid in Guatemala during her intervention.

Draft report from the Technical Committee:

- ✓ Despite Mr. Graziano da Silva (Director General of FAo in LAC) commitment in the Women's Strategic Meeting of maintaining the Gender Office Post for one year with clear mandate for ICARRD follow up process, the draft report is GENDER BLIND. A bypass mention to equity and broad diversity of actors within family farming is made, but clearly this does not reflect civil society interventions and the women's declarations delivered to many delegates. It is alarming to see the resistance to use a gender sensitive and inclusive language.
- ✓ Despite civil society strong presence and critical interventions asking for a moratoria on biofuels and demanding FAO to focus on promoting the right to food; the Technical Committee suggests:

"That FAO could make an important contribution by supporting the mapping of the bioenergy capacity of each country and the biofuel production potential of interested countries."

This decision moves FAO further and further away from its original mandate in a region where 209 millions people live in poverty (38.9%), 81 million in extreme poverty (15.4%) and 52 millions affected by malnutrition (10%);

- ✓ The expected outcome from some countries present on the need to start a process of drafting a Voluntary Code of Conduct on Biofuels was totally lost. The Committee considered it too premature.
- ✓ Clearly, civil society positions are out of this draft making it crucial a strong engagement during the next days until the Round table on ICARRD follow up, where a window of opportunity is opened.



Laura Hurtado (ActionAid) during an interview to TV Globo where she highlighted the negative impacts of biofuels production in Guatemala.

Women raised their voice to give visibility to their claims and took the opportunity to present their struggle and demands during a collective interview

