

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

September 2006

World Rural Women's Day 2006
"Rural Women: Leaders of Tomorrow"

MESSAGE FROM KAREN SERRES, PRESIDENT, IFAP COMMITTEE OF WOMEN FARMERS



““Rural Women: Leaders of Tomorrow”, just one more slogan? Not at all, it is a question of the future of humanity!

Hunger and malnutrition still concerns too many countries. In the poorest countries, rural women produce a very large proportion of the food. They are therefore right on the front line in fighting these problems. What's more, rural women throughout the world are able to both contribute to a better respect of natural resources and promote sustainable development;

But are they listened to? Are their demands for access to land, credit, seeds and tools acknowledged? Is it enough to politely ask leaders that are often men and town dwellers for the needs of rural women to be accepted? Of course not!

It is up to us, rural women on all continents, to fully assume our responsibilities. To move forward, we have to take on our personal time to become involved in the world of politics. It is not out of desire but out of necessity that our duty is to lead the way by becoming the leaders of tomorrow.

The disastrous consequences of male dominated governance oblige us. Humanity is made up of two halves so of course, purely female governance would also be disastrous. For a better balanced and more equitable society we therefore need rural women leaders.

My dear friends and colleagues, you are all my sisters and as families do, we must support one another. It is not easy to invest outside our own households, farms and families. Going to meetings, attending courses, speaking in public and daring to assert ourselves all require courage and determination.

I am not asking you to make this sacrifice for any titles or honours. Life is short and our energy should not be wasted on vain personal ambition.

Let's become leaders in order to give our daughter and our sons a future. We know that nobody is able to defend the interests of well balanced, living rural communities than we, rural women, are. We therefore have to accept this challenge by becoming leaders today and tomorrow. Let's create a future for everyone!

Enjoy the World Rural Women's Day celebrations!



Mrs Addo Comfort Ghana

Some persons are born with the quality of a leader, others acquired this quality and others are supposed to have this quality from their lineage (queens of a clan, town village etc). Among women are Queen mothers and leaders of the village who support the chiefs to take decisions. Even with a high level of illiteracy, women are able to solve problems and take decisions in the rural areas. But they need information to progress.

Mrs. Comfort is a fishmonger and a tomatoes producer from Ghana. She has little education and is married with children. Her husband is a non educated fisherman and farmer.

She has been the local village leader of the Kokrobite Fish Smokers Association. Being a member of the association, her capacity was built to be a leader through mentor / role model of the National co-ordinator.

She was elected as the National President of DAA and thought at first that she could not lead the group due to her illiteracy and her undeveloped leadership qualities.

After her election, the Executive Board personally informed her husband of her new role and its implications i.e. attendance to meetings within and outside the village, combine the household chores and the association programme. The Board asked for the support of her husband.

At first, she thought because of her illiteracy, she could not attend meetings outside the village and voice out farmers' views. With a little assistance and encouragements from the National Coordinator, she is now operating as President with the use of local language. With this initiative, all other community rural women leaders are learning from her example. As at now, all the community leaders (rural women) are the entry points to the communities and they show responsibility of their leadership. She therefore recommends that educated women leaders could work closely with the illiterate leaders in rural areas to assist the rural leaders to understand some of the agricultural policies which they will explain to

the other rural women using their own language. It increases the impact of understanding and encourages more rural women leaders to be involved in the process.

Mrs. Comfort accepted the challenge and understood the need to build her capacity to explain the agricultural policies to her colleagues at their level and build a sustainable farmers' organisation with her team. Thanks to workshops and encouragements, she can now explain some of the agricultural policies to other rural women.

Mrs. Comfort believes in team work and team building. She has the leadership quality by always trying to settle misunderstanding between fishermen and fishmongers at the beach, when it comes to payments and cleanliness at the beach. Her approach has made her a role model. The few men in the group also give her due respect. She is faithful, dependable and hard worker, qualities that are recognised by all members of the group.

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Mrs Rattan Manjari Negi India

Rattan Manjari Negi has established herself as the unopposed leader of her community in village Ribba in Kinnaur District of Himachal Pradesh in India. She was born in 1952 in a farmer's family and has dedicated herself to the advancement of the interest of the farmers in the mountainous region and continues to fight for the right of the women farmers who can still not own or inherit property in the tribal "Negi" community.

She has University education and is a very well informed farmer. She says that her mother who came from a rich landed family willed her share of land (which is an exception in the community) to her daughter as her personal gift. That is how Rattan Manjari has her orchard, growing apples and other fruits and also cultivating seasonal vegetables.

As a young girl, she was distressed to find the poor status of women in her community and grew up with visions of empowering them and

getting them their entitlements. She organized the Mahila Kalyan Prarishad for the welfare of women and worked on various issues for them. She was encouraged by her liberal parents to take up the leadership in the community. For the last quarter century, she has been leading the community and representing them at various fora. She was elected as President of the Panchayat (local body) in three consecutive elections. All the time, she contested as an independent candidate and was ahead of other candidates posed by different political parties. She has been elected twice as the Member of the Zilla Parishad (District Panchayat). She was not able to get the majority votes when she contested for the State Legislature, as she would not fight on any political party ticket but only as an independent candidate.

She says very confidently that she has been able to raise a lot of awareness in the people of her community – not only knowledge about better farming and new technologies, but also on their rights and entitlements. Women, particularly in the tribal community, are not given right to property, though they have been encouraged to get educated and take up employment. She says a lot of women are still in distress, as they do not have access to assets, particularly land. Women from the hills are sturdy and hardworking. They do a great deal of work, particularly in agriculture even though the land still does not belong to them. They deserve to own the assets and take decisions for themselves.

She says she had so much work to do for her community that she did not find time to marry and settle down with a family of her own. People of her region swear by her and will not exchange her for any other leader.

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**Mrs. Christiane Lambert
France**

Activism runs in my blood! At an early age, I developed a taste for becoming totally involved in my activities as head of the class, captain of the handball team, and member of the choir and various associations.

My parents, who were farmers and militants, handed down to me a love for the Other, efficient work, and an enthusiasm shaped by the values of responsibility and solidarity. I became a farmer at the age of nineteen when I was still a single woman, running a family-size farm of 25 hectares, near the one owned by my parents in Cantal. My husband joined me a few years later. And then from 1989 onwards, we jointly managed the farm taken over from his parents in Maine-et-Loire, which consisted of 75 hectares of land devoted to cultivating crops and breeding pigs.

Being very attached to work on the land, I consider my commitments to union activities to be an extension of my profession as a farmer. In 1980, I joined the Centre of Young Farmers at the district, departmental, regional and then national level. In 1994, after 14 years as an active unionist, I was elected president of the National Centre of Young Farmers, the first woman to be appointed as head of a national agricultural organisation. I carried out this function until 1998. I enjoy group action and the dynamics of a project, and I would venture to say that it is men who pushed me to assume responsibilities.

My creed is based on the fact that it is possible to run a modern and profitably farm while respecting the environment. This conviction led me to become a member of FARRE (Forum de l'agriculture raisonnée respectueuse de l'environnement). In 1999, I was elected president of this national association. I developed a culture of change within this framework because I was convinced that it is impossible to construct anything sustainable without first confronting ideas. I have always been opposed to conservatism, and in my capacity as Vice-President of FARRE and of FNSEA (Fédération nationale des syndicats d'exploitants agricoles) since 2005, I continue to take action aimed at developing a positive and modern vision of our agriculture.

There are few women in agricultural executive bodies in France. And yet I do not believe it is more difficult to become involved in such bodies as a woman. A suitable organisation is, of course, necessary. For me, the family unit is the most precious aspect of my life, it is my

“haven of peace”, enabling me to relativize emergencies and priorities. Those who surround me in my everyday life soothe my anxiety and stimulate my desire to take action. If I am able to handle responsibilities with a feeling of serenity, it is thanks to my husband who shares the same beliefs even though he follows a different path; he gives me loyal support and bears a heavier workload in the running of the farm. And it is also thanks to an extraordinary nanny, a second mother for our three children.

One frequently encounters women at local level. But it is more rare to find them at regional or national levels because it is sometimes difficult to be far from one’s family, and to reconcile family and professional life. Women farmers, who are militants at heart, women of action and decision tied to their land by passion, hold the reins of numerous local associations and structures. This commitment is an invaluable contribution to the vitality and appeal of rural districts.

On the whole, I do not feel that there is any specific obstruction or reticence about electing women to responsible posts in agricultural organisations. On the contrary, there is a tendency to seek a balanced representation of genders, since this is increasingly being considered as an asset. The biggest obstacle (and this is a daily struggle) is the fear felt by certain farmers whenever they are confronted by change. In view of the speed of developments and lack of clarity, it is up to us professional executives to point the way and to support farmers so that these changes for the better will become the source of a new social recognition tomorrow.

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Mrs. Nibia Olid Uruguay

The story of my life as a rural woman is marked by memories and experiences of my childhood. I come from a family of humble origins from the Velazquez region in the Rocha district in Uruguay. I attended a rural school and, from very early on, I had to do my share of rural family chores. We lived modestly but with major difficulties

I moved out to attend school, but I was always linked to rural activities and I was always very “rebellious”, I liked bringing together groups of people who defended the activities of small farmers. Later in life, I was a teacher. I had an enriching experience, with a married couple of physicians who had founded a residential home for students; there, I donated my time as a volunteer working with young rural farmers who came from the most remote areas. In order to pay for what was needed at this home, we had to work and work hard. It was a rewarding experience, always preaching the love for the land and the farming activities: “if you sow, you shall harvest and if you harvest, you shall eat”. I preached the same sermon later in life, when I had my own family.

In 1986 I joined AMRU. At that time, I cultivated and processed fruits, and vegetables; I was part of a group of craftswomen, and still today, we continue working together.

Around that time, I convinced my husband to sell our goods at a fair during the tourist season in “La Paloma”, a resort in my district. During the day, I sold corn, going from one house to the next with a basket and at night I marketed my products at the crafts fair. In 2000 I started playing a more active role in AMRU, as a district representative, organizing courses, workshops, tours, exchanges, working closely with rural women living in the poorest and most remote areas, trying to offer my support so they could overcome their difficulties. As a representative, I was elected chairperson of the Association and together with my fellow women workers we continued working hard and becoming Leaders. I feel that we been successful at the helm of AMRU; we have more rural women involved every day, with more tools at their disposal to do their job, with better training and education to articulate and negotiate our projects and our niches with other organizations and political stakeholders.

In the course of this path I have lived through the harshness of my life in the rural sector and I have felt useless and relegated as a rural woman in society. Nevertheless, what I have lived through at AMRU has made me stronger, with the exchange of experiences and with the tools to face reality and to be able to look for solutions for the small rural family.

Today, as vice-chair of IFAP's Committee on Women Farmers, I hope to share all I have learned in my personal experience to bring about a more just and equitable world!

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Mrs Robyn Boundy Australia

A change from horticulture to intensive livestock production in 1967 was for me more than a change in production. It opened up a whole new avenue of personal development. My mind needs to be kept stimulated and I have never stopped learning and sharing knowledge with others.

At that point I became involved in the Pork Industry and agripolitics. 39 years later, I am more involved than ever and have learnt so much about the internal structures both within industry and all levels of government in Australia. This understanding is vitally important in ones ability to break through the "grass ceiling".

I have learnt that as the only woman for many years within the Pork Industry that has put up a hand to be involved at a State and National level, being accepted as a credible, knowledgeable, and passionate producer has opened many doors for me to achieve.

My current positions are: State Vice President of Queensland Pork Producers (3 Years), Board member of QPP (18 years), Delegate to Australian Pork Ltd (12 years). Previously, I was a Board member of the Queensland Animal Health Council. In this position, I was the only non academic person appointed. This made me feel very inadequate as I had completed year 8 in formal education with all other board members holding Dr. of Veterinary Science degrees. Daunted, I was asked to present a short paper to the National body and received accolades for the content of the paper.

To move forward, one has to be a logical and forward thinking personality to be accepted by the majority of industry people. I have learnt to put up my hand and ask to be involved. In

earlier times, this came as a shock to leaders particularly when I asked if I could chair a session at an international intensive livestock conference. My courage in asking was fulfilled with a session to chair.

My motto is that I must step outside my comfort zone to continue to grow.

Being totally hands on within my business as owner has provided me with a full understanding of all aspects of business and production issues which inturn provides me with a greater insight than many of my fellow delegates.

Doors continue to open if I am willing to be involved.

The recent cyclone "Larry" that devastated a wide area of Far North Queensland provided me with the insight and ability to progress intensive livestock issues which had been overlooked in legislative documents when a Natural Disaster occurs. I was able to provide an avenue of direction for correcting these issues without having to reinvent the wheel. This was done through utilising the principles and tools gained through national training that I had undertaken for another purpose within the livestock industry.

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Mrs. Zehia Bouzouita Tunisia

Mrs. Bouzouita is a Tunisian farmer who works within the Tunisian Agricultural and Fishing Union in her capacity as Secretary General of the National Federation of Biological Agriculture.

She is 58 years old, married with three sons and two daughters, and comes from the Tunisian Sahara. As a child, Mrs. Bouzouita used assist her farming father who owned a large olive grove. She inherited from him her love for agriculture, especially olive trees.

After her marriage, Mrs. Bouzouita decided to study the electrical industry in order to manage her small electricity company more efficiently.

However, in 1991, owing to her husband's state of health, she found herself having to cope with a large abandoned farm in the south of Tunisia, a region famous for its century-old olive trees.

Mrs. Bouzouita encountered several obstacles, such as the state of the fallow land and the impoverished soil. Furthermore, the equipment was in a very poor condition and the trees had been drastically pruned, after which they suffered from a long drought. Restricted financial resources, together with the difficulty of supervising workers who refused to be directed by a woman, also marked this phase.

Despite all these difficulties, Mrs. Bouzouita decided not only to persist but also to introduce innovations in her area. With this objective in mind, she drew up the following farming programme: (1) to win the trust of the people working on the farm, (2) to make the equipment operational again, (3) to find the necessary funds, (4) to improve the plantations with other varieties of olive and almond trees. And to achieve success, she did not omit the most important ingredient: to work without respite and to believe in her potential to win the challenge.

In the year 2001, she turned her attention to biological agriculture, the new niche that was initiated in Tunisia in April 1999.

After fulfilling her childhood dream and accomplishing her duty appropriately, Mrs. Bouzouita gave her family name to the farm which became known as "Domaine Bouzouita", an estate spread over 500 hectares of protected land, including the famous "Chemlali" olive trees, which has earned the biological agriculture certification Ecocoert since 2001. Today, olives, cereals, fruit cultivated for drying, spices and citrus fruit grow in a subtle symbiosis between technological innovations and traditional agricultural methods.

As Secretary General of the National Federation of Biological Agriculture of her country, Mrs. Bouzouita feels that she must serve as a model in this post so that other high level positions are entrusted to women. She is, in fact, supported by men farmers who have

realised that she is capable of making their dreams come true and of fulfilling their objectives.

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**Mrs Anne Chambaret
France**

How do you reconcile your personal life, your occupation, and your professional responsibilities, with the concern of continuing to be a woman with many faces: wife and mother, farmer and head of a business, trade unionist and professionally responsible?

To be in harmony with that which we strive to achieve is the key to success.

To take some time out to recharge one's batteries.

Being oneself and true to one,

Knowing what you want and to prioritize what you want,

Love your job, wanting to share your convictions with others.

In fact, the secret to achieve success lies, above all, on an achieved personal equilibrium, at the core itself of one's private life:

Harmony and encouragements, family support from your spouse and children, essential conditions which give rise to a silent force.

To explain what you do, keep in touch with them during our absences, be interested and involved in what they go through from afar, and give them their place in their respective activities.

To communicate, share what we do, delegate, because nobody is indispensable and the world does not come to a standstill while we are away, trust and believe in others.

This is also true in our private life and in our professional life!

Is it useful to remind us that before being responsible and ready to fight for others in defending their occupation, one must remain being a farmer in the loftiest sense of the word, i.e. really participate in farming and remain close to the concerns of others in their respective sections?

In more general terms, in France, to be recognized also as a woman, we must manage to succeed in three areas.

If a woman does not succeed in the first area, she is seen as « without a profession »,
If she does not succeed in the second one, she is seen as career-oriented,
If she finds success in extraprofessional activities, it is due to the fact that she can be supported by her husband!!!
Because only women are capable of doing it all in order to succeed in this challenge.
What man ponders upon succeeding in these three parameters?

Thus, being away on business allows us to take a step back from oneself, to think about the choices one makes, the values, redefine your priorities, to organize your private, social, professional and responsible life.

Giving others, is also receiving in return the recognition, explicit or unspoken, from society which enables women to exist and to be fulfilled, with the satisfaction of contributing with information, with ideas, sharing them, exchanging them, creating ties and savoring the diversity which heightens the richness of human relations.

IFAP thanks farmers' organisations and women farmers for their contribution to this exchange of experience with women farmers around the world.

This Newsletter is available in English, French and Spanish and can be seen on IFAP's Website www.ifap.org

Please send your comments at:
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The IFAP Committee on Women in Agriculture is a discussion group whose mission is to put forward women farmers' issues and advocate for their rights around the world.

“Greater involvement of women farmers in formulating the policy positions of the farmers' organisations, as well as an active participation in all debates, are essential to ensure that their specific requirements are incorporated in the farm policies”

The Committee.