

Statement
by
D-8 Secretary General Dr. Seyed Ali Mohammad Mousavi at the
D-8 Meeting on Rural Women Empowerment 17-18 November 2014, Tehran - Iran

H.E. Dr. Talebi,

Managing Director of Agriculture Bank

H.E. Ambassador Bizmark,

D-8 Commissioner of I.R. Iran

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed an honor for me to be associated with this new but very important meeting. *D-8 Rural Women Empowerment* is a unique initiative to improve status of the rural women and contribute to their social and economic empowerment. It also contributes to the sustainable development process of the D-8 Member States.

On behalf of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation (the D-8), I would like to welcome you all to this meeting.

To begin with, I deeply appreciate and thank the Government of the Republic of Iran, the Agriculture Bank of Iran in particular, for this well-organized meeting and for the warm hospitality, providing us with a very comfortable venue in the capital city of Tehran. I would also like to express my appreciation to all delegates here, whose dedication and support has made this meeting possible.

Distinguished Delegates,

I would like to start with a brief observation on the important role of rural women and their great contribution in enhancing economic development. Rural women are key agents in the transformational economy, environmental and social changes required for sustainable economic development. According to the United Nation and the World Bank in their reports in 2014, women compose 43% of the world's agricultural labor force. Bearing in mind the fact that 76%

of the poor lives are in rural areas, the decreasing rate of world's hunger and poverty is credited to rural women for their contribution to productive agricultural resources.

In the D-8 countries, rural women represent around 40% of the agricultural labor force, and produce, process and prepare much of the food available, which make them an indispensable part toward attainment of food security. At a time when smallholder agriculture is changing rapidly as a result of commercialization, globalization, climate change, new technologies and migration patterns, it is important to recognize the key role that women are playing in agriculture in the D-8 countries. They need support for assisting them to adapt to these changes and to seize emerging opportunities.

Now-a-days, rural women in D-8 countries face particular challenges in access to services and gender equality. It is imperative for us to empower rural women as an enabling action to achieve greater economic security. To do so, we need to give more attention to their education and skill development as well as to increase their participation in decision-making process and leadership role.

Distinguished Delegates,

Within the context of this overall sketch, let me now turn to the agenda of our meeting today in Tehran. As all of you here know, this meeting, the first ever initiative on rural women empowerment within the D-8 framework, has been initiated by the Agriculture Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Its main objective is to enhance the role of rural women and their social and economic empowerment.

In this two-day meeting, we need to look into the common challenges facing rural women empowerment in the D-8 Member States and to work on devising an effective framework to collectively face the challenges. This meeting is a good occasion to exchange experience and best practices on rural women employment, job creation in rural areas, access to information through internet infrastructure and banking with better financing package and capacity building schemes.

In addition, we also need to consider and discuss mechanism to develop substantive schemes for the rural women based on the action plan for cooperation amongst rural institutions in the D-8 Member States. This meeting may discuss and explore, in a very objective manner, a set of practical actions and measures that serve our rural women in actual terms by addressing, among others, the need for easy access to credit, health care and education. Empowering them is vital, not only to the well-being of individuals, families and rural communities, but also to overall economic productivity, given women's large presence in the agricultural workforce in the D-8 countries.

I believe that it is high time that we took timely initiatives to ensure our rural women with better education and training, to promote their participation in decisionmaking and leadership as well as to provide better access and infrastructure. Some of the areas that this meeting may discuss on and explore possibility of framework cooperation among the D-8 countries, may be as follows:

1. attracting private sector to invest in rural areas, including manufacturing companies;
2. facilitating rural women with better land schemes/management;
3. providing education and capacity building programs with the aim of encouraging them to be better entrepreneurs;
4. facilitating better access to rural financial services (i.e. micro credit facilities, easy access to loans, bank accounts etc.); and
5. providing better access and infrastructure and creating effective linkages between urban and rural areas.

With the above in mind, I encourage our institutions in rural development to work together and create mutual collaboration between D-8 governments and private sectors in order to enhance the role and productivity of our rural women, reinforce initiatives for rural areas development and promote further prosperity, equity, and justice.

Distinguished Delegates,

I believe that institutional and effective collaboration between our governments and

private sectors for facilitating rural women activities could further improve the prospects for securing gender equality and empowerment of women in rural areas among the D-8 countries.

Once again, I am confident that this gathering will be a key reference point to promote the rural women policies in providing better economic infrastructure in the D-8 Member States.

I would like to, once again, thank the Government of Islamic Republic of Iran, especially the Agriculture Bank of Iran for their warm hospitality and arrangements of this meeting and wish this event a great success.

I thank you for your audience.