

AS WRITTEN



World Food  
Programme

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**SPECIAL SESSION ON THE ICPD +5**

**Statement of WFP Executive Director, Catherine Bertini,  
delivered by Jean-Jacques Graise, Assistant Executive Director**

**World Food Programme**

**30 June 1999**

INVESTING IN WOMEN IS AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO CATALYZE THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN BOTH STABLE AND RECOVERY SITUATIONS. INVESTING IN THEIR EDUCATION AND TRAINING IS ONE OF THE BEST INVESTMENTS OF ALL.

**THERE HAS BEEN INCREASING EVIDENCE WHICH QUANTIFIES THE DEVELOPMENT IMPACT OF EDUCATING GIRLS AND WOMEN.**

- A RECENT STUDY SHOWED THAT **IMPROVEMENTS IN WOMEN'S EDUCATION HAVE** ACCOUNTED FOR 44 % OF THE **REDUCTION IN CHILD MALNUTRITION OVER THE PAST 25 YEARS. WHEN WOMEN'S STATUS ALSO IMPROVED, THAT PERCENTAGE INCREASED TO OVER 50%.**
- WOMEN'S WAGES RISE BY **10-20%** FOR EACH YEAR OF SCHOOLING -- AND FOUR YEARS OF SCHOOL INCREASE **FARMER PRODUCTIVITY BY 9%.**
- **SHE MARRIES LATER AND REDUCES HER FAMILY SIZE: IN MANY PARTS OF THE DEVELOPING WORLD, WOMEN WITH SEVEN OR MORE YEARS OF SCHOOLING HAVE TWO TO THREE CHILDREN FEWER THAN WOMEN WITH UP TO THREE YEARS OF SCHOOLING.**

ACCORDING TO NOBEL LAUREATE AMARTYA SEN, "WE WILL GO A GREAT WAY IN SOLVING THE WORLD'S POPULATION PROBLEMS BY **EDUCATING WOMEN AND MAKING SURE THEY HAVE EMPLOYMENT.**"

ON THIS AUGUST OCCASION, 5 YEARS AFTER THE SUCCESSFUL ICPD CONFERENCE IN CAIRO, I WOULD LIKE TO FOCUS ON THE **WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME'S COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN -- BECAUSE OF ITS CROSS-CUTTING IMPORTANCE TO ACHIEVING THE GOALS OF ICPD -- AND TO WFP'S OBJECTIVE OF FOOD SECURITY FOR ALL. OURS IS A COMMITMENT NOT ONLY FOR DEVELOPMENT BUT ONE THAT EXTENDS TO PROLONGED HUMANITARIAN CRISIS SITUATIONS**

WHEN EDUCATION, LIKE HEALTH AND FOOD SECURITY, REMAINS A CONSTANT AND CONTINUING IMPERATIVE, ESPECIALLY FOR **WOMEN AND GIRLS** -- A FACT WHICH IS TOO OFTEN OVERLOOKED BUT WHICH WE MUST NEVER LOSE SIGHT OF.

AS PART OF WFP'S BEIJING **COMMITMENTS TO WOMEN**, WFP **HAS COMMITTED TO SPEND 50% OF ITS INVESTMENTS IN EDUCATION ON GIRLS AND WOMEN.** OUR EXECUTIVE BOARD THIS YEAR ENDORSED EDUCATION, ESPECIALLY FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN, AS ONE OF THE **FIVE PRIORITY AREAS** FOR USING FOOD AID AS A DEVELOPMENT INVESTMENT.

ONE OF OUR NEW APPROACHES TO ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO SEND THEIR DAUGHTERS TO SCHOOL IS TO PROVIDE FAMILY **TAKE-HOME FOOD RATIONS FOR GIRLS.** THE RATIONS ARE PROVIDED AT INTERVALS INTENDED TO MAXIMIZE THEIR ATTENDANCE, PERFORMANCE AND RETENTION AT SCHOOL.

THIS APPROACH IS WORKING IN 15 COUNTRIES. IN **PAKISTAN**, FOR EXAMPLE. IN THE TWO PROVINCES WITH THE LOWEST EDUCATION INDICATORS AND WIDEST GENDER GAPS, IN A MATTER OF 6 YEARS:

- . **GIRLS' ENROLLMENT HAS INCREASED BY OVER 200%**
- . **DROP-OUTS HAVE BEEN REDUCED, AND**
- . **DAILY ATTENDANCE RATES NOW AVERAGE 80%.**

IN **NIGER**, WHERE ONLY 19% OF SCHOOL-AGE GIRLS ARE IN PRIMARY SCHOOL, AND 93% OF WOMEN ARE ILLITERATE, PARENTS RESPONDED IMMEDIATELY WHEN TAKE-HOME RATIONS WERE INTRODUCED.

AND IN **BENIN**, THE NUMBER OF GIRLS ENROLLED IN SCHOOL SHOT UP BY 280%, WITH 92% OF THESE GIRLS STAYING ON IN SCHOOL.

WHILE WE ARE ENGAGED IN EDUCATING GIRLS AT SCHOOL, WE ALSO HELP IN ENABLING WOMEN TO HAVE A **GREATER VOICE IN DECISION-MAKING**. TO ACHIEVE THIS, WFP PROVIDES **TRAINING FOR WOMEN, IN LITERACY AND IN OTHER EMPOWERING SKILLS**.

. WE HAVE SEEN THE IMPACT ALREADY. IN **BANGLADESH**, LANDLESS WOMEN WHO HAVE INVESTED TWO YEARS IN OUR **FOOD-FOR-TRAINING** ACTIVITIES, HAVE BETTERED THEIR LIVES, EARNING MORE INCOME, INCREASING THEIR HOUSEHOLD FOOD CONSUMPTION, SAVINGS AND ASSETS, AND IMPROVING THEIR STATUS IN THE COMMUNITY.

THIS **EMPOWERMENT** CAN HAPPEN THROUGH OTHER ACTIVITIES BESIDES DIRECT TRAINING PROGRAMS. IN **NEPAL**, FOR EXAMPLE, IN A **WOMEN-ONLY FOOD FOR WORK** ACTIVITY, WOMEN LEARN THAT THEY HAVE RIGHTS. THEY GAIN MANAGEMENT SKILLS AND BUILD THEIR SELF-ESTEEM. IN ALL OUR DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND IN OUR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE OPERATIONS, WE ENSURE THAT WOMEN MANAGE THE DISTRIBUTION OF FOOD AID IN THEIR COMMUNITIES.

WE AT WFP ARE COMMITTED TO **STRATEGICALLY INVESTING IN GIRLS AND WOMEN**. THROUGH EDUCATION AND TRAINING, THROUGH SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION SUPPORT IN **MOTHER-CHILD CENTRES**, THROUGH ASSET-PRODUCING EMPLOYMENT SCHEMES AND BY BUILDING ON THE INGENUITY OF WOMEN IN CRISIS SITUATIONS, WE HAVE FORGED STRONG PARTNERSHIPS IN THESE COMMUNITIES, WITH UN SISTER AGENCIES LIKE UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP, FAO, WHO, ILO, IFAD, THE WORLD BANK AND OTHERS, AS WELL AS WITH LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL NGOS.

THESE PARTNERSHIPS, IN THE PRIORITY ACTION AREAS IDENTIFIED IN THE HAGUE DECLARATION ON ICPD REVIEW, HELP BRING US ALL CLOSER TO ACHIEVING THE GOALS OF:

- . EMPOWERING WOMEN TO HAVE A **GREATER VOICE IN DECISION-MAKING IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS.**
- . HELPING WOMEN RESPOND TO THEIR PARTICULAR **HEALTH NEEDS**, ESPECIALLY DURING THEIR REPRODUCTIVE YEARS, INCLUDING DURING HUMANITARIAN CRISES
- . INCREASING THEIR HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY
- . PROMOTING ASSET CREATION AND A SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE BASE FROM WHICH TO IMPROVE THEIR LIVELIHOODS.

**WE ARE HERE TO REAFFIRM THAT INVESTING IN WOMEN IS NOT AN OPTION BUT AN IMPERATIVE. WOMEN ARE THE KEY TO ENDING THE HUNGER TRAP – THEY ARE THE AGENTS OF CHANGE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITY. THEIR ADVANCEMENT IS CRUCIAL TO FREEING THE 830 MILLION PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD WHO ARE TRAPPED IN THE INSIDIOUS CYCLE OF HUNGER AND POVERTY.**