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# Women: The Key to Ending Hunger

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## SUMMARY

It is the thesis of this paper that strategies to end hunger and alleviate poverty, if they are to be successful, must include women. Women are a principal, if not the sole, economic support of themselves and their children. Increasingly, they are responsible for ensuring that adequate food supplies are available and that their families have access to enough income to purchase food if they do not grow it themselves. The facts show that:

- One out of every three households in the world has a woman as its sole breadwinner; in some countries it is one out of two.

- Women produce 80 percent of the food in Africa; 60 percent of the food in Asia and the Pacific; and 40 percent of the food in Latin America.

- Women direct their earnings to meet the needs of their families.

It cannot be emphasized enough that we must find ways to enlarge women's productive capacities and income. Yet their access to resources, such as credit, training and tools that would enable them to increase their production and income as small farmers or micro-entrepreneurs, is still limited. To achieve the end of hunger, women must have access to the resources they need and the opportunity to participate at all levels.

Education and primary health care for women are extremely important. In many developing countries no more than a third of the women are literate and their chances of

dying in childbirth are very high.

The global economic crisis and structural adjustment reforms have caused a serious deterioration in the living conditions of poor women and children in developing countries. Heavy cuts in government spending in the health and education sectors have forced women to work longer hours and to provide services that formerly were furnished by the government. It is essential that special efforts be made to strengthen health care services and to increase the enrollment of girls and women at every educational level if women are to be effective agents of change.

Institutional support at a level that would enable and empower women to take advantage of opportunities is currently missing or insufficient. National machineries created in the wake of the UN Decade for Women to guarantee participation of women in all development efforts are often understaffed and lack power and financial resources. It is critical that more support be given to national machineries and to nongovernmental organizations that focus on women. Bilateral aid agencies and multilateral organizations need to enhance their efforts to include women at all levels.

Information on women and their contributions to the economy should be included in official statistics since inadequate data and misperceptions about women's contributions currently distort planning and decision making.

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