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The Food Aid Organization of the United Nations

## News Release

7 March 2006

### INVOLVING MEN IN CREATING A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD FOR WOMEN

**ROME** – The United Nations World Food Programme has chosen the theme of “Partnering with Men to Achieve Gender Equality” for this year’s International Women’s Day (IWD)\*, to stress the importance of the two sexes working together to improve women’s lives around the world. While ensuring that women are prioritized in WFP’s food aid operations, the agency today highlights the value of involving men in the struggle to achieve lasting equality.

This year’s IWD award is being presented to the WFP Country Office in Zambia, where milling projects at two camps for Congolese refugees demonstrate good partnership between men and women.

The mill at Kala camp, a 200 km trek from the Zambian border with the Democratic Republic of Congo, is run by Kipampa, a Congolese mother of six, whose team-building talents and entrepreneurial flair have conquered doubts in the community about women’s capacity to learn skills and implement such a profitable project.

“Women across the developing world often need to learn new skills to take more control of their lives,” said Sheila Sisulu, WFP Deputy Executive Director, speaking on the occasion of International Women’s Day. “Bringing men on board is crucial because they have specific skills to share and can wield influence to change attitudes. These can make a real difference in women’s lives.”

In Ethiopia, where HIV/AIDS is a major challenge, about 60 percent of facilitators in WFP-supported training are men who have become role models for the community. Similarly in North West Tanzania, where HIV/AIDS is widespread among refugees, men have become facilitators in HIV/AIDS education, prompting other men to attend with their spouses.

In northwest Bangladesh, men’s encouragement of women in training programmes for small businesses has led to husbands’ support groups which advocate for protection of women and prevention of violence. Training forms the backbone of WFP’s projects for the advancement of women in several countries around the world.

An example of a WFP project which brings multiple benefits for women is the making of fuel efficient stoves in Darfur, western Sudan. Among the countless women displaced from their

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homes by continuing conflict are 30 who were initially taught how to make the stoves. They, in turn, have trained a further 4,400 women.

The gains are immediate: 40 percent less firewood is needed for cooking, so the women make fewer trips in search of it – thus significantly reducing their daily labour and exposure to sexual assault. Women, who traditionally collect firewood either for their families or for income, have increasingly become the victims of sexual violence outside the camps where they live.

Food aid can also make a dramatic difference when used to prompt a change in cultural practices which severely damage women’s health – such as female genital mutilation. FGM, which has blighted the lives of millions of women around the world, particularly in Africa and the Gulf, has now been outlawed by the government in Djibouti, where 99 percent of women living in the country have been mutilated. Under a project called “Motherhood without Risks”, those who perform the mutilation (usually women) are provided with food aid as an incentive while they learn an alternative trade.

During her ten-year tenure (1992-2002), Catherine Bertini, WFP’s previous Executive Director, initiated WFP’s global practice of targeting women as the key recipients of food aid, to ensure that the food reaches those who need it most. Experience has shown that when women are in control of food, their children have a better chance of growing up well nourished, going to school and becoming productive members of society.

WFP is marking this year’s IWD with a variety of activities at its regional bureaux and country offices around the world. At a celebration at the headquarters in Rome, Executive Director James Morris is presenting the Catherine Bertini award (a cash prize of US\$20,000) to the Zambia Country Office for its successful milling project.

“We men must aggressively support, encourage and partner with women around the world to achieve their rightful place, taking control of their own lives,” said Morris, a strong advocate of women’s equality. “The seven nominations for this year’s award range from projects where men share traditional skills in Niger, Liberia and Zambia to HIV/AIDS awareness training in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Lesotho. They all show that innovative ideas are being put into practice for women’s equality.”

“The involvement of women at all stages of feeding the hungry is essential. Agencies like ours must continue to be creative in our efforts to attain equality for women, through training and education, which are key to ending world hunger,” Morris added.

*\* International Women’s Day is celebrated around the world on 8 March.*

*A video and b-roll featuring WFP Zambia’s work on partnering with men to achieve gender equality is available from Jonathan Dumont ([jonathan.dumont@wfp.org](mailto:jonathan.dumont@wfp.org)). Photographs are also available from Rein Skullerud ([rein.skullerud@wfp.org](mailto:rein.skullerud@wfp.org)).*

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WFP is the world's largest humanitarian agency: each year, we give food to an average of 90 million poor people to meet their nutritional needs, including 61 million hungry children, in at least 80 of the world's poorest countries. **WFP -- We Feed People.**



**WFP Global School Feeding Campaign** – For just 19 US cents a day, you can help WFP give children in poor countries a healthy meal at school – a gift of hope for a brighter future.

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