

Attachment 11

CSW62 (2018)

IAW Statement

Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls

Rural women are active agents of economic and social change and environmental protection. However, they are in many ways and to various degrees constrained in their roles as farmers, producers, investors, caregivers, and consumers.

Rural women comprise 1 in 4 people worldwide and they constitute a large share of the agricultural workforce. They play an essential role in ensuring food and nutrition security, eradicating rural poverty and improving the well-being of their families.

Yet, they continue to face serious challenges as a result of gender-based stereotypes that deny them equitable access to opportunities, resources, assets, and services.

The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is intrinsically linked to the lives of women and girls globally, including that of rural women who are vital to its success. The goals to end hunger, achieve food security, and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture as well as the goals to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment are particularly focused on rural women.

It is intrinsically recognised that poverty is heavily concentrated in rural areas and that substantial progress towards achieving the SDGs depends heavily on improving agricultural and rural development.

Improvement in agricultural performance has the potential to increase rural incomes and purchasing power for large numbers of people in rural areas.

Thus more than any other sectors, agriculture can uplift people on a mass scale. A virtuous cycle of reduced hunger, increased productivity, increased income and sustainable poverty reduction can be started.

If rural women had equal access with men to productive resources such as seeds, tools and fertilizers, they would increase yields on their farms by 20 to 30%. This would raise total agricultural output from 2.5 to 4% reducing the number of malnourished people from 17 to 12%.

Rural women are key agents for achieving the transformational, economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. What

are the main challenges women and girls are facing today and what should be done?

Leadership, decision-making and voice

The under-representation of rural women in political and public life is high in most countries. States should establish quotas and targets for rural women's representation in decision-making positions.

When women are engaged in producers and traders' associations, cooperatives, labour councils and financial institutions, they can lobby for their views to be heard, for their needs to be met, and for their rights to be respected.

Institutional arrangements are needed to support the participation of women in policy-design, implementation and evaluation as part of decision-making processes.

Equal access to and control of land and other rural productive resources, technology, markets, and financing

States should ensure that national laws and policies guarantee rural women's right to land including upon divorce and separation and their right to inheritance in both customary and statutory systems. It is estimated that rural women own less than 10% of property in the developed world and 2% in the developing world. Ensuring rights to land is vital for rural women's economic empowerment.

Priority should be given to raising women's awareness of their rights, forcing legislation and increasing women's access to legal assistance.

Women's access to financial services including savings, insurance and credit is essential to allow them to benefit from economic opportunities in rural areas. Access to micro-finance can increase women's investment in technologies such as solar panels to generate electricity as well as agricultural technologies to enhance the profitability of their businesses.

Promoting rural women's employment, decent work and social protection

While being livelihood source for 86% of rural women and men, and a job generator for 1.3 billion smallholder farmers and landless workers, agriculture alone cannot reduce poverty.

States should ensure and expand the equal access to opportunities for employment and decent work in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors.

They should facilitate the transition from the informal to the formal sector including through promoting and strengthening women's economic opportunities in micro and small enterprises, sustainable social enterprises and cooperatives. These enterprises and cooperatives can be started in the rural industry, in trading enterprises, agribusiness, transport, storage, infrastructural development, local service sector, tourism.

States should establish or expand national social protection systems with a gendered perspective to provide basic social protection and social support measures for rural women of all ages. They should also take measures to ensure sustainable long-term financial support for such systems. Social protection floors should also be recognised by states as the provision of a systemic base to address poverty and vulnerability.

Unpaid care work, infrastructure and service delivery

The most important barriers that strategies of rural development and employment generation programs face concerning rural women and their access to decent work is unpaid care work, the unequal sharing of care, and other household responsibilities.

Women account for more than half of the total burden of work. However, women's paid market activities represent only 1/3 of this work compared to men who represent 3/4 of this work. Time spent by women in domestic responsibilities limits their opportunities to participate in the labour force or to engage in economic activity and entails missed opportunities to attend school.

States should reduce unpaid care work through investment, infrastructure and labour saving technologies that are focused on household care tasks to help rural women to reconcile work and family responsibilities.

Measures are also needed to increase access to health facilities, education, training and other support services.

Unpaid care work should be valued and made visible to policy-makers in order to become the subject of policy attention and investment in rural areas.

States should implement policies favourable to burden sharing and challenge gender stereotypes that prevent men from contributing to unpaid care work.

Data Collection

The need to improve the collection of data disaggregated by sex, age, rural, urban areas as well as gender-sensitive indicators is imperative. The analysis and use of data are critical for gender-responsive policies in rural areas, (design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation).

To meet the above challenge of closing the gender gap, efforts have to be undertaken to empower women and girls in rural areas. We, therefore, call on member states to:

Increase investments and infrastructure, essential services, indigenous, traditional and new technologies and productive capacities in rural areas to reduce rural women's unpaid care work and enhance their sustainable livelihoods.

Recognise and support women as actors in climate change adaptation, mitigation, disaster risk reduction, and resilience strategies (protection of water, food, fuel energy, and livelihoods).

Strengthen gender-responsive accountability mechanisms to ensure that rural women and their organisations can influence policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring at all levels of government with a view to enable rural women to hold all duty bearers to account.