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Statement submitted by Rural Development Institute, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Secure land rights for women are essential building blocks for women's economic empowerment, particularly for women in rural areas who too often lack rights to the land they toil and rely on for livelihood. Women are half of the over one billion rural poor who eke out an existence on less than \$2 a day, and their prospects of breaking the yoke of poverty are bleaker than those of their male counterparts due to lingering discriminatory laws and gender biased social norms curtail their opportunities for economic, social, and political empowerment.

Globally, more than 400 million women farm. In sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, the majority of employed women work in agriculture — 60 and 70 percent, respectively. With no guarantee to their land, women grapple with fewer means and incentives to invest in the land, access seeds, fertilizer, and equipment, to increase its productivity and yields. The Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that if women had equal access to non-land resources, yields on women's land would increase by 20-30 percent, contributing significantly to food security. When women have strong land rights they are able to earn more and carve out a resiliency cushion. Women with secure property and inheritance rights in rural Tanzania earned up to 3.8 times more income and held 35 percent more savings.

Under formal law, according to UN-Women, women have equal rights to property ownership in 115 countries, and to equal inheritance rights in 93 countries (UN-Women, Pursuit of Justice, 2010-2011). However, the 2012 Social Institutions and Gender Index of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development found that in 79 countries with equal rights to own and access land, discriminatory practices curtail such rights in practice. Even where land access is legally enshrined, women are often relegated to smaller, lesser quality plots, lack access to requisite agricultural extensions services, and face lingering gender bias and discrimination within families and communities and by officials implementing land reform schemes.

Women's participation and leadership in rural councils responsible for major land-related decisions, including allocations and investments, remains the exception. Women rarely head or chair rural councils in Bangladesh (0.2 percent) and Cambodia (7 percent) (UN-Women & UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women, Rural Women and the Millennium Development Goals, 2012). In Tanzania, where progressive laws mandate at least 25 percent council-level participation by women but do not require a gender quorum, women continue to be absent, silent or marginalized in discussions about major decisions affecting the entire community, including the fate of their livelihood. A 2016 World Resources Institute study of Tanzania, Mozambique and the Philippines concluded that "women's lower rates of literacy, limited mobility, and care responsibilities can also present barriers to the exercise of their rights."

Recognizing this reality, Member States of the Commission on the Status of Women unanimously agreed in its last session (March 2016) that women must have equal rights to a range of land rights, from access, ownership to control over land. Responding to the 60th session's priority theme of linking the sustainable development and women's empowerment, the Commission on the Status of Women's Agreed Conclusions — the consensus document that governments negotiated during the March 2016 session — contain two explicit references to

women's rights that urge states to anchor a normative framework for women's land rights which would require states to not only enact strong, unequivocal laws, but also to ensure equal rights are realized.

The Commission on the Status of Women's call for legislative and pragmatic measures to ensure women's land rights by all states represents major progress and an important milestone, particularly for rural women. The Commission on the Status of Women commendably called for an end to land rights' discrimination against women, recognizing that such rights are central both to sustainable development and to the full realization of women's human rights and empowerment.

The Commission on the Status of Women's past consensus-based Agreed Conclusions have stressed that women's rights to land, property and inheritance are central to sustainable development, environmental management and mitigation of natural disasters, effective land reform and decentralization processes, life-cycle and economic empowerment of women, and to reduced vulnerability to violence against women (Agreed Conclusions, sessions 57, 2014; 41, 1997; 46, 2002; and 2013).

These assertions by the Commission were echoed by the watershed acknowledgment of land rights in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda places women's and men's land rights at the core of global development priorities, recognizes their cross-cutting importance and their foundational link to eradicating poverty (Goal 1), ensuring food security (Goal 2), and reducing gender inequality and empowering women (Goal 5).

Governments' global and highly publicized commitments around land rights are further articulated in targets 1.4, 2.3, and 5.a and will be tracked using corresponding indicators 1.4.2, 5.a.1 and 5.a.2. Goal 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment focuses on women's secure rights over agricultural land and on legal frameworks that guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership or control indicators (indicators 5.1.a-b). However, for a comprehensive understanding of women's land rights, there is a dire need for systemic evidence of both state documented secure tenure and women's (and men's) perceptions of their tenure, a combination that Indicator 1.4.2 under Goal 1 on ending Poverty is best placed to capture.

The millions of women who depend on land and farming for their income, employment, and social security stand to benefit immensely if laws, policies, and programs become better informed by such evidence, on local, national, and global level.

The following recommendations link this Session's theme of economic empowerment with last session's focus on the Sustainable Development Goals, but calling for urgent and immediate steps toward realization of those commitments:

- States, United Nations bodies, and others involved in implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals should collect and make accessible gender-disaggregated data to track women's rights to land in practice, including their rights to access, use, and control land.

To that end, United Nations agencies should ensure that women land rights-related indicators received top priority as cross cutting indicators and prioritize Goal 1 End Poverty's Indicator 1.4.2 seeking to capture both legal and social dimensions of women's land tenure security.

- States should develop country-level indicators to track women's secure rights to land to ensure effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda's goals and targets.
 - State should ensure women are recognized as farmers and enabled to access and benefit from state schemes and services designed to improve land use, productivity, and sustainability.
 - States should ensure that national land reform programs and schemes acknowledge the equality of women's rights to land and should take concrete and accountable measures to secure the land rights of women and men, including development of program to support the attainment of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.
 - States to enshrine in law and policy and take practical measures facilitate genuine, meaningful, and active participation by women in land governance bodies, processes, and decision-making.
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