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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

An Ageing and Unequal World

In October 2015, the World Health Organization published the World Report on Ageing and Health and emphasized the profound impact that ageing populations around the world have on individuals and society more broadly. Even more pronounced were the many ways in which older people could continue to positively contribute to society if provided the opportunity and resources to maintain their health across the life course. Despite the potential optimism many inequalities continue to persist and impede healthy ageing. Women, especially older women in rural areas are further marginalized by socioeconomic inequities prevalent in the world today.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reaffirms the need to create greater opportunities for policies that aim to increase equality, functional ability and overall quality of life globally. However, despite data presented in the World Population Ageing Report published in 2017, highlighting that women tend to outlive men by 4.6 years and, as a result, represent 54% of the global population over 60 years older, older women are currently largely overlooked in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the data do not reflect the inequalities older women often experience in terms of decreased access to healthcare, education and employment, as they age.

In order to adequately address the priority theme, “challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls”, resources are needed to ensure that the inequalities experienced by marginalized women within this population, specifically older women living in rural areas, are formally acknowledged. Older women are a valuable resource and contribute in many ways to their families, their communities, and to the national economy. They must no longer be a forgotten and neglected group.

Dealing with Age while Empowering Rural Women and Girls — A Review of the Priority Theme

In 1946, the Commission on the Status of Women was established with the overarching goal of promoting women’s rights in political, economic, social and educational fields. Although there have been major strides to achieve this, Sustainable Development Goal 5 reiterates that there remains a need to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Social norms and patriarchal beliefs have resulted in deep-rooted gender based discrimination; women are less likely to have access to education, have less social mobility, are more likely to work in the informal labour market and have less access to healthcare. For those living in rural areas the physical location increases not only the likelihood of experiencing inequalities, but the severity of their impact as the social norms of rural societies produce different outcomes when compared to larger urban centers.

These impacts are even more pronounced when the impacts of discrimination associated with age, and ageism are experienced. More effort is needed to acknowledge and include older people and ageing in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which promises to leave no one behind. Until this is done, older women will remain invisible and not experience the benefits of the international efforts to eradicate barriers that exist due to gender inequality.

Being an older woman in a rural population means that they will age with all the aforementioned inequalities negatively impacting their health and well-being. The migration of younger generations to urban centers and the corresponding reduction of in-home care have increased social isolation. Combined with a lack of

financial independence and healthcare knowledge, many older women experience double and triple jeopardy and oppression within their communities, such as persecution or isolation due, but not limited to, physical ability, ethnicity, ethnicity, religion and sexuality.

Reflecting on Older Women and the Impact of the Agreed Conclusions of the 47th Session

The Agreed Conclusions of the 47th Session on the Commission of the Status of Women provided the impetus to improve “participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women.” Many initiatives following the 47th Session Agreed Conclusion have been able to successfully empower women through the increased access to these sorts of technologies. For example, by developing a mobile learning and communication initiative known as the TIC-as, rural women and girls in Costa Rica experienced greater access to opportunities for learning and social innovation. To maintain the success and sustainability of programs like Tic-as, when moving forward they must address the barriers that prohibit older rural women from utilizing these initiatives. Specifically, there are areas that, if addressed during the development of new information and communication technologies, would not only increase the reach of these projects, but would also reduce the inequalities experienced by older women in rural areas at the same time. Lifelong learning is essential to help reduce poverty among older women.

Social Inclusion and Collaboration

The United Nations Report on the World Social Situation published in 2003, asserts that the situations of vulnerability experienced by specific social groups is an outcome of the economic, social and cultural inequalities these groups experience. Consequently, older women in rural settings are in a particularly precarious situation as they experience all inequalities at the intersection of age, gender and physical location. These inequalities function as barriers and lead to social isolation in societies all around the world.

Sustainable Development Goal 17 calls for the strengthening of global partnerships for sustainable development. This is also what is necessary to address the inequalities that older rural women experience globally. Through global collaborations of stakeholders at all levels, these barriers that impede the health and well-being of older women in rural areas can be eliminated, and women and girls of all ages can be empowered and experience gender equality.

Recommendations

The undersigned, as members of the Stakeholder Group on Ageing, recommend the following:

- Utilize pre-existing global knowledge brokers and key-informants, as in civil society, to promote awareness of the issues faced by older women in rural and remote settings;
- Expand the pre-existing networks by encouraging ageing organizations to consider the issues faced by rural populations, and organizations focused on women in rural areas to look into the difficulties faced by those who are older;
- Advocate and implement policies for gender equality, taking into consideration the intersections of inequality experienced by older women in rural areas;

- Enable older women to be economically secure by encouraging entrepreneurship through such mechanisms as micro-financing and other means of earning an income;
- Ensure age-friendly communities in rural and remote areas empower women of all ages through increased access to transportation, health, social security, housing, social and civic participation, employment, information and communication, outdoor spaces, community support, respect and social inclusion;
- Ensure the disaggregation of data that acknowledge women are not a homogenous group and that older women's concerns must be taken into account.

Conclusion

The current demographic trends demand that greater attention be paid to the fact that the world is ageing and that older women outnumber older men. We have the opportunity at the 62nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women to ensure that no group of women is forgotten in the fight for gender equality. Fostering international collaborations and initiatives that draw attention to the difficulties faced, and often ignored, by older women in rural areas, is a strong step in securing a world where women globally can age with dignity and equality.

Endorsed by International Federation on Ageing
