



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
13 December 2017

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-second session

12–23 March 2018

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) Limited, 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

Soroptimist International is a global volunteer movement working together to transform the lives of women and girls with nearly 80,000 Members in 124 countries.

Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI) has 7500 Members in Clubs in 28 countries who work at a local, national and international level to educate, empower and enable opportunities for women and girls.

Our vision is that Women and girls will achieve their individual and collective potential, realise aspirations and have an equal voice in creating strong, peaceful communities worldwide.

SIGBI presents to the participants of the 62nd Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women the following statement for consideration of the Commission in its deliberations on Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

We recognise that for many years the need for improvement of everyday life for women and girls in rural areas has been placed on the global agenda with sadly little progress being made.

SIGBI calls on the United Nations and its Member States to find effective short term and long-term methods to overcome the challenges and advance the opportunities which will empower rural women and girls and lessen the gap in gender inequality by:

Equal access to quality education at all levels

More than 63 million girls are out of school. Barriers to be addressed include strong cultural norms favouring boys' education and delegating household obligations to girls, inadequate sanitation facilities in schools, unsafe school environments and gender-based violence.

Lack of or poor transport facilities exacerbate this problem in rural locations from both the student and staff aspect often resulting in poorer teaching standards, facilities and ultimately grades which has a direct impact on future employment and empowerment. Accessibility to modern technology, Intermittent or non-existent power supplies and social isolation all impact on the student's ability to achieve.

Rural women play an increased role in educating communities particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. By educating the leaders, the community will flourish.

Thousands of displaced women and girls are now living in basic communities without access to any education. Migrants and refugees must be considered as having the same if not worse access to education.

Equal access to the work place

The employment opportunities for women in rural communities are lower than for men and, taking into account unpaid work, women work longer hours than men.

Women are more likely than men to be employed part-time. While this can help them to better balance work, household and childrearing responsibilities, part-time jobs are often associated with lower hourly wages, less job security and less training and promotion opportunities than full-time employment.

The role of women is significant and crucial for the progress of rural households, local and national economies. Women are farmers and farm workers, horticulturists,

business women and community leaders. Rural women are the backbone of sustainable livelihoods and provide food security for their families and communities.

“The new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have gender equality and women’s empowerment at their core, and include a target to “double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women.” Indeed, rural women are critical to the success of almost all the 17 SDGs” (Ban Ki-moon).

It is essential to build resilient social protection systems, labour and product markets, governance institutions, and civil society organizations so that rural women can both contribute to and benefit from sustainable development.

In rural areas of the United Kingdom, many women and girls experience not only relative poverty but also the “non-income” poverty of isolation, loss of dignity and barriers to participation in community life owing to cuts in transport facilities and the closing of local shops and facilities such as post offices.

Austerity measures imposed on public services such as reduction of access to health services and changes in State pensions and benefits as well as closure of facilities supporting survivors of domestic abuse and violence have impacted severely on rural women.

Ensuring women’s rights to property, land and inheritance

Ownership of land and property empowers women and provides them with income and economic security. Without these resources, women have limited say in decision-making within the household and often are left even more vulnerable to domestic violence and denial of other basic rights. The Beijing Platform for Action and CEDAW should both be used to underscore the importance of women’s rights to land and property.

Ownership brings with it responsibility and a desire to improve. Granting land ownership will have a direct, as well as indirect, effect on maintaining ecology, preserving the land and increasing food production thus satisfying many of the SDGs.

Protecting the environment

Natural disasters and climate change contribute to the challenges faced by rural women with extensive flooding, damage to crops through drought, loss of homes and land being basic.

Recent disasters have demonstrated that women and girls become more vulnerable and examples can be shown of the need for intervention to prevent human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Access to Healthcare

Morbidity and mortality suffered by women in childbirth is increased in rural areas with poor facilities and equally poor access to suitable health care.

Poor and malnutrition is also exacerbated in these areas which impacts on general health, ability to work and ability to engage in gainful activities.

Equality and empowerment of women are global issues. Women’s rights are human rights and a prerequisite for poverty eradication and for a positive sustainable development.

Rural women’s economic empowerment is fundamental to create profitability in the economy as a whole and promote social justice and equal opportunities.