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Statement submitted by Coordination Française du Lobby Européen des Femmes, 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

A necessary change in agricultural production methods to promote equality between women and men in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The concept of rural space is constantly evolving and its definition varies depending on how distant rural areas are from urban centres. However, various factors that affect rural areas give rise to numerous inequalities. These areas are less densely populated, far from urban centres and, in some cases, subject to desertification or otherwise affected by persistent economic difficulties. Nevertheless, rural environments are also fundamentally linked to the agricultural sector, without which not only food production but also economic growth and social cohesion would not be impossible.

The agricultural sector provides for our basic needs, but it also faces the pressures of productivity and new environmental requirements.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, if access to production needs was identical for women and men, hundreds of millions of people in the world would no longer suffer from hunger. Only an estimated 10 per cent of women own land, and yet the work done by women accounts for 50 per cent of the world's food needs.

In France, the farming profession tends to be passed down through the male lineage, since only 13 per cent of farm successors are women. When building their farming business, these women face significant obstacles. These include a lack of confidence from investors, who force them to farm smaller plots of land (40 per cent smaller than those of men) and difficulties in obtaining bank loans, which considerably increases their borrowing rate (25 years for women, on average, compared to 10 years for men).

In France, Mutualité sociale agricole (MSA), a social welfare organization for agricultural workers, indicates that in 2017, women make up 25.4 per cent of the agricultural workforce. Among individual heads of agricultural businesses, 22 per cent are women, 60 per cent of whom took over from their husband after his retirement. Women in agriculture often have little social or political visibility. In 2014, 9 out of 10 *conjoints collaborateurs* (spousal business partners) were women, while 8,500 women were still of undefined status, which meant that they received less social protection or were not entitled to personal pension schemes. In addition, although women farmers have been able to benefit from the same length of maternity leave as women employees since 2008, only 55 per cent of them have access to services which provide a replacement for them during such leave.

One solution for French women farmers would undoubtedly be to apply for a definite status and to use the opportunity available to them since 2010 to establish a *Groupement Agricole d'Exploitation en Commun* (GAEC), a type of farming association, with their spouse, which entitles them to receive services on the basis of contributions by each of the members.

The high cost of land is a barrier to women setting up an agricultural business in France, even though women are more sensitive to the environment, consumers, health and food quality. Selling directly to consumers and diversifying products and activities are tasks that are taken on by women, most of them younger and more educated. Local communities should play a major role by collectively advocating for

an agricultural sector that has a better balance between short and long distribution channels and production processes focused on local consumers without food waste.

To curb rural poverty, which affects women more than men, the practice of systematically expanding farming operations or agricultural production to offset losses should be dropped. Organic farming currently generates better profits than conventional farming and it employs more women.

In addition, in response to the need to increase agricultural yields indefinitely, France uses 80,000 tons of pesticides per year.

It is the third largest user of pesticides in the world and the largest user in the European Union.

As a result, farmlands are being degraded to such a point that they are no longer viable. This also poses a real threat to water, which in some of our regions has become unfit for consumption owing to the use of nitrates and other toxic chemicals.

Protection of the quality and quantity of farmlands therefore depends on ambitious land management policies. The expansion of farms and urbanization (the excessive extension of commercial and industrial zones) dangerously restrict land ownership, particularly for women who wish to set up in business.

We know that the participation of women is essential for the provision of food security, sustainable agricultural practices and better integration of biodiversity. As we have already highlighted, agricultural holdings of women farmers are more likely to use short distribution channels of sale and diversify activities. Strengthening the role of women in agricultural production would therefore stimulate economic growth.

We recommend:

- Focusing on Sustainable Development Goal 2 “Zero hunger“, specifically, targets 2.3 and 2.4
- Focusing on Sustainable Development Goal 3 “Good health and well-being“, specifically, target 3.9
- Focusing on Sustainable Development Goal 5 “Gender equality“, specifically, targets 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 5(a) and 5(c)
- Focusing on Sustainable Development Goal 6 “Clean water and sanitation“, specifically, target 6.3
- Focusing on Sustainable Development Goal 8 “Decent work and economic growth“, specifically, target 8.4
- Focusing on Sustainable Development Goal 10 “Reduced inequalities“, specifically, target 10.3
- Focusing on Sustainable Development Goal 12 “Responsible consumption and production“, specifically, targets 12.2, 12.3 and 12.4
- Focusing on Sustainable Development Goal 15 “Life on land“, specifically, target 15.3

1. Improving governance in rural areas

(a) Ensure political parity on electoral lists for all local elections and appointments to intercommunal bodies;

(b) Apply the same rules as those established in chambers of agriculture, economic organizations, trade unions and cooperatives, which take into account the percentage of women farmers in the active labour force.

2. Carrying out publicity and awareness-raising campaigns and training courses on equal opportunities for women and men for all male and female stakeholders at all levels

(a) Promote better access to training and remove barriers to access for women farmers;

(b) Organize regular information campaigns on the status of women in agriculture, communicate better about the status of women farm owners, which must ensure full economic and social equality, including with respect to farm ownership. Facilitate access to assistance for setting up business and owning land;

(c) Improve the protection of pregnant women farmers and the information available to them regarding standardized maternity leave;

(d) Educate pregnant women about the harmful effects of toxic products used in agriculture;

(e) Establish coordinated land development policies to keep farmland at a fair price and guarantee the quality of the soil.

3. Introducing reliable gender-sensitive statistics, which may point to the specific needs of women in rural areas and are essential for designing tailored responses

(a) Establish alternative forms of childcare to ensure a better work-life balance, taking into account the limited resources of rural communities and the atypical hours in agriculture;

(b) Pay particular attention to the mobility of rural women by keeping services and health care within villages.

4. Ensuring decent incomes, full social protection and retirement pensions for women farmers

(a) Improve the professional earnings of women farmers by finding a fair balance for the distribution of price margins on food products;

(b) Do not allow major producers to lower incomes; prevent products from being purchased below cost price.

5. Developing inclusive, organic and sustainable agriculture
