



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

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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 International Council of Women/  
Conseil International des Femmes, Soroptimist International,  
Soroptimist International of Europe, Women for Water Partnership,  
Zonta International, non-governmental organizations 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## **Statement**

### **Introduction**

International Federation of Business and Professional Woman (IFBPW) supports statements of our sister organizations on increasing the number of women in decision-making and management and prevention of any kind of violence against women. We, however, focus here on issues that are close to our heart and have not received as much attention.

We emphatically support the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), including the Optional Protocol; we urge the remaining governments to sign up and other governments to take out all the exemptions.

We will strive to assist implementing the Beijing Platform for Action; ILO Decent Work Agenda and the importance of the ILO Resolutions No. 100 on Equal Pay and No. 111 on Discrimination in the Labour Market; the OECD initiative for equal pay, Women's Empowerment Principles and 2030 Agenda — and request governments to assist us with that.

2030 Agenda recognizes the crucial importance of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 as essential for achieving all the interconnected goals and targets. The Agenda represents a comprehensive and transformative framework that clearly links the gender equality and empowerment of rural women and girls to other goals and targets, inter alia, ending poverty in all its forms (SDG 1), eradicating hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture (SDG 2), universal access to safe water and sanitation (SDG 5), achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all (SDG 8) and taking action to combat climate change (SDG 13).

IFBPW unconditionally supports rural women eliminating barriers which limit their rights for living at adequate standard and ensuring income security and social protection. We would like to see measures that enable them to stay “home” and not having them or their children to move to the cities. Rural women are key agents for achieving the transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. Limited access to credit, land and water, transport, health care and education are among the many challenges they face, which are further aggravated by the global food and economic crises and climate change. Empowering them is key not only to the well-being of individuals, families and rural communities, but also to overall economic productivity, given women's large presence in the agricultural and care workforce worldwide.

### **Legal Structure and Affirmative Measures**

Governments have to create conditions to improve the economic independence of rural women, in the implementation of legal frameworks, development policies and investment strategies at all levels.

- Increase public and private investments in infrastructure in rural areas, including roads, waterways and transport systems; appropriate, accessible, affordable technologies; storage and market facilities; livestock facilities, irrigation systems, affordable housing, water and sanitation services, electrification facilities, and information and communications networks
- Strengthen the capacity of domestic financial institutions to encourage and expand access to insurance and financial services for activities of women —

most rural women not having independent access to finance and thus impacting on their financial freedom.

- Remove structural barriers which limit control, access to and ownership of land, water concessions and other productive resources. In 59 per cent of 161 countries, the law guarantees women and men the same land rights; however, customary, traditional and religious practices discriminate against women and undermine the full implementation of the law. In four per cent of those countries, women explicitly have no legal right to own, use or control land and water. Not only do women have less access to land than men, but they are also often restricted to so-called secondary land rights, meaning that they hold such rights through male family members and thus risk losing those entitlements in the case of divorce, widowhood or the migration of the male relative.
- Increase investments in research and development, in particular on sustainable practices and (agricultural) technologies, and accelerate the transfer of such technologies, information, methods, practices to reach all users, including farmers, women, youth and indigenous people and those in remote rural areas to make them “Triple A”: affordable, appropriate and accessible.
- Foster innovation and sustainable industrialization to create conditions for women to have access to the industrialization on their areas of living.
- Secure the rights to an adequate standard of living, decent wages and ensuring income security and social protection. Of the approximately 1.1 billion people engaged in agriculture, only 300-500 million of them are waged workers.

### **Education and Life Long Learning**

Education, skills development and technical training are central to agricultural and rural employment. To be successful, vocational and skills and training have to take into consideration the characteristics of national and local labour markets. For women in particular, the learning group is an important means to gain self-confidence and get empowered. If learning groups are sustained, they can play an important role for strengthening rural institutions, increasing women’s role in leadership and mitigating the risk of further poverty and marginalization.

- Eliminate illiteracy in rural communities.
- Facilitate TVET Programs (Technical-Vocational Education and Training) for rural women including indigenous women in order to:
  - Support the use of (new) (appropriate, affordable and accessible) technologies and harmonize modern technologies with traditional and indigenous knowledge for sustainable rural development
  - Support resilience and to prevent, cope with and recover from natural disasters by raising awareness about climate change mitigation and adaptation possibilities
  - Enhance access of rural populations to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation and their capability to maintain those themselves
  - Promote the adoption of environment-friendly activities in agriculture and develop training for rural populations in the use of green agricultural technologies.

### **Connectivity**

Rural women and girls continue to face serious challenges in carrying out their multiple productive and reproductive roles within their families and communities;

much of their labour remains unpaid and unrecognized, including their disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, upon which their households and local economies depend.

Schooling of children, running businesses in rural areas, social interaction, and securing women's safety have more or different impact on women in small rural areas than for women in big cities.

- There are no safe houses/refuges or victim support services for rural women, so they often feel there is nowhere to go
- Eliminating all gender stereotypes through education: Small rural communities can be tightly knit and this can detract from a woman's ability to seek support and help. In farming circles, often the family home is tied with work. Violence offenders may still need to access the property to carry out work, and if the perpetrator goes to court and loses the job, the woman and lose the family income and home.
- Pregnancy scans cannot be done in many rural areas. This results in the woman having to go to a larger centre, which can be difficult for transport, care of other family members/siblings — putting the life of mother and baby at risk.
- In particular SDG2 recognizes the need to invest in smallholders as critical to increasing food security and nutrition for the poorest, facilitating sustainable and diversified food production and consumption, and recognizing and protecting rights of women and girls to food of sufficient quality and quantity to meet their nutritional needs.
- Better Mental health services are woefully needed to cope with current demand and frequently women do not seek help — they can be the last to be cared for while they are busy caring for everyone else.

#### **Data, Monitoring and Evaluation**

Sex-differentiated statistics and indicators (SDG17) must be collected nationally, regionally and globally and made available in order to measure gender gaps and consequently adjust development programs to rectify inequalities to ensure women's empowerment in the world of work.

- The real condition of rural women was frustrated by the lack of data. Transparent gender and location disaggregated data have to be compiled according to SDG 17.18 to enable targeted and appropriate measures
- Indicators that will be particularly critical to guaranteeing women's land & water rights and tenure security, that is, SDG 1.4.2 on secure land rights; SDG 5.a.1 on rights over agricultural land; and SDG 5.a.2 on legal frameworks, including customary law, that guarantee women's equal rights to land and/or control over land and 6.1 and 6.2 that guarantee access to water & sanitation
- We stress the need for implementing modern ICT tools, that can play an effective role for exchange of information, but also e.g. in collecting citizens' data to support implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. The latest WSIS 2016 inter alia stressed the role ICT can play in improving agricultural practices and nutrition (E-agriculture)

**Conclusion**

Equality between women and men is a basic human right. Rural women and girls face persistent structural constraints that prevent them from fully enjoying their human rights and hamper their efforts to improve their lives as well as their extended families. Rural women, in particular, face multiple forms of deprivations and discrimination, major barriers to access productive resources and face disadvantages and exclusion rooted in the power inequalities associated with gender roles, leaving them disproportionately under-represented even among the rural poor.

As the world moves toward the achievement of the 2030 agenda, it would be possible to build stronger communities, stronger global economy and achieve all development goals by improving rural women's livelihoods, accessing to justice and legal rights, economic empowerment and decision making at all levels.

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