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Statement submitted by Nederlandse Vrouwen Raad, 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

Rural women across the world face numerous challenges on a daily basis. Only together can we find solutions, in particular to tackle climate change, inequality, the lack of good infrastructure, quick internet, transport, good facilities and (care)services for everyday life and other problems faced by women and girls in rural areas.

The agricultural sector is key to the vitality of rural areas, enhancing generational renewal, social cohesion and economic growth. Agriculture also contributes to providing safe, nutritious and healthy food, to the diversification of the landscape, to mitigating climate change and to preserving biodiversity and cultural heritage.

Although women farmers and women working in rural areas face similar constraints to women in urban areas, they are also confronted with other difficulties due to the specificities of rural areas.

Challenges for rural women worldwide

Women comprise an average of 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries.

Women own less than 20 per cent of land worldwide (between 5 and 12 per cent in developing countries).

Rural women account for the production of half of the world's food.

Women have limited access to seeds, credits, to climate-smart technologies & to services (fertilizers, livestock, mechanical equipment, financial, school training, health care, etc.).

For many, the livelihoods comes from small-scale farming, almost always informal and often unpaid.

More women (and children) than men die from natural hazards when their socioeconomic status is low.

Women and children bear the main negative impacts of fuel and water collection and transport in many developing countries, which are intensified in contexts of economic crisis, environmental degradation, natural disasters, and inadequate infrastructure and services.

Challenges for Rural Women in the EU

In 2015, the rural population represented 19.13 per cent of the total EU population, and rural areas generated 17 per cent of total employment in the EU.

Female entrepreneurs represent only one third of self-employed people in the EU and women farmers represent 30 per cent of the total EU farm managers. They tend to have smaller farms: on average 5.84 ha compared with the 12.88 ha owned by male farm holders. Women take more calculated risks than men, yet it is still difficult for them to access credit. Women's ideas for innovation are as marketable as men's, but they are not recognised by predominantly male stakeholders.

In rural areas, women are more frequently employed in part-time and temporary jobs than in urban areas. Women are also generally concentrated in lower paid roles, which in turn has consequences on the social structure of rural communities. 25.5 per

cent of those living in rural areas in the EU are likely to live in poverty or social exclusion.

Some European women face an even more difficult challenge: they do not have access to legal recognition of their part-time or full-time work on a farm. In fact, apart from farm managers, in many countries, some family members working on farms do not have social protection or legal recognition, and are therefore not covered for maternity leave or against accidents in the workplace, for example.

The Dutch Council of Women urges UN members and all stakeholders to embrace the opportunities that the rural world can provide and to help women and girls to achieve gender equality.

Demographic change is creating a pressing need for policies that integrate women into the labour force. In particular, if rural women are equally integrated into the labour market and enjoy equal pay, they can help to increase household income, improve living conditions, reduce poverty, and enhance economic, social and territorial cohesion in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals. The Dutch Council of Women calls for equal integration and equal pay.

Worldwide, agriculture in rural areas is managed by family farms which are veritable success stories. Indeed, they bring the principle of the eco-social circular economy to life. This is why the Dutch Council of Women calls for strong social protection of all family members involved in agriculture. Shared-ownership of farms and agricultural enterprises must be promoted and the economic and social role of assisting spouses recognised. Assisting spouses need personal protection, including guaranteed support for medical expenses and for cases of illness or work accidents, decent allowances in the event of maternity leave, temporary help in the household, and fair old-age pensions.

In order to help them reconcile a seven-day working week on the farm with “invisible” family responsibilities, women living in rural areas require better health care, childcare and elderly care, which would thereby boost living conditions. This is not only important for women living on farms but for all rural women and girls!

Advisory services, education, lifelong learning, validation of skills acquired and acquisition of new skills, training for women but also for their families is essential for viable rural areas. That is why the Dutch Council of Women calls for good education and lifelong learning for women and girls in rural areas.

The future of rural areas and agriculture also very much depends on a high-speed broadband internet connection and the use of new technologies. Internet access will help to overcome isolation, to enhance contact and to encourage the use of e-commerce and platforms facilitated by quality ICT. It will help girls and women to do work for school and trainings and it is incredibly important for women owning a company or farm in rural areas, to run that company in a proper and modern way.

Entrepreneurial networks must be supported in order to increase women’s empowerment and gender equality and to guarantee living standards equivalent to those living in urban areas.

Women need financial advice and the same access to credit as men

The Dutch Council of Women also calls for the support of entrepreneurial initiatives that will provide extra family income, multifunctional farms (combining agri and rural tourism, direct marketing, paid social services like care for children and for the elderly, or educational school programmes).

Women farmers and women in rural area need support to strengthen their participation in networking activities and in the bodies making decisions on rural policies.

These opportunities will provide women with the inspiration needed. Women farmers and female entrepreneurs can be at the forefront of innovation and diversification. Women possess special interpersonal and communication skills as well as awareness and knowledge of local needs, contributing to local and community development and strengthening identity. In conclusion, the Dutch Council of Women calls on UN Members and stakeholders to promote gender equality policies and to ensure the empowerment of rural women. The participation of women in the social and economic sphere will create jobs, reduce inequalities, promote gender equality, reduce the risk of poverty, prevent the depopulation of rural areas, and ensure that rural and agricultural activities contribute to biodiversity and sustainable food production.

The UN's support will make the rural world richer and help implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

About the Dutch Council of Women

The Dutch Council of Women (Nederlandse Vrouwen Raad) is an national umbrella of more than 50 women's organisations in the Netherlands from different sectors in society, among which the agricultural sector. The Dutch of Council is active nationally and internationally on issues such as employment and care, emancipation, violence against women and sustainability. In the Netherlands the Dutch Council of Women facilitates its member organisations, provides input on policy and action plans, and develops joined projects on main thematic areas such as: women's rights and gender equality and women's role and active participation in society.

Internationally, it provides input in policy processes and (inter)national action plans from women's & gender perspective. The Dutch Council of Women promotes the voice of women in Europe through the European Women's Lobby (EWL) and the United Nations. Since the establishment of the UN, the Dutch Council of Women selects the UN Women's Representative to the annual UN General Assembly, speaking on behalf of The Netherlands.
