



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
7 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 Dianova International, 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 Call to End Structural Gender Inequality in the Rural Areas

Dianova is an international NGO which comprises associations and foundations operating in the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa. Dianova's member organizations contribute to the development of individuals, communities and organizations through a variety of programs and interventions in the social, health and humanitarian sectors.

On the occasion of the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Dianova echoes the unheard voices of millions of rural women and girls and calls upon Member States to disaggregate data about this population in order to be able to deliver according to their needs and to make them a priority in their efforts to end poverty. To start thinking of adequate solutions, it is necessary to end the data gap which is making rural women and girls invisible to statistics, policies and decision-makers, and contributing to the perpetuation of structural gender inequality.

Gender transformative-solutions for rural women and girls

Rural women are key economic and emotional supporters of their households and communities: they represent an average of 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force and yet they often endure double or triple shifts in their roles as primary caregivers and responsible for all reproductive work at home (Women Watch). In addition, in the job market they are frequently subjected to unpaid, underpaid, or undervalued, temporary, unsafe and informal jobs. If this is a common reality in the cities, for women in rural areas the situation is even severer.

Poor rural infra-structures and lack of care services contribute with maintaining the status quo of culturally assigned gender roles and restricts to opportunities for women even farther. To change this reality, every effort addressing the challenges of rural communities must incorporate a gender-transformative approach in the solutions, addressing the sources of inequality between men and women in the specific contexts. Programs and policies in this field must have gender-equality and women's rights in the centre of its objectives and must understand the gender relations in the community, as well as the specific barriers impeding rural women to fully access the job market.

Revealing the barriers to gender equality for rural women and girls

Rural women's contribution to society is often limited by a variety of well-known reasons, usually in aggravating conditions when compared to rural men or urban women and men, namely: strict gender roles; lack of education and training and of access to seeds, credits and agricultural technologies; discrimination and lack of flexibility in the job market; domestic violence; lack of access to services or trust in the public system, etc. The perpetuation of such unbalanced conditions leads to rural women being globally much more affected by poverty than men, having less access to health and other services, as well as being less educated and more reliant on their partners than their male counterparts. Undeniably, the lack of economic empowerment is an outstanding cause for rural women's subjugation in the private and public spaces, as well as for the lack of representation of their communities in decision-making bodies and at national levels, and for an aggravating vulnerability to domestic abuse.

In order to make progress and break the cycle of poverty for rural women and girls, the reality in which they live and the needs which this reality generates must be fully understood. While challenges faced by rural and urban women may often

overlap, some conditions may be particularly relevant in rural contexts, such as the impact of issues related to land rights, female genital mutilation, and isolation. Thus, producing disaggregated and gender-sensitive data as well as data that can capture the specific situations lived by women in rural areas is a fundamental step to ensure that the particularities of these underlining circumstances are revealed. To achieve this, governments must engage with grassroots, nongovernmental and non-official data producers and service providers experienced with the respective communities, so they can act as an organic part of the planning, coordination and monitoring of actions.

Beyond economic empowerment: creating structural changes for rural women and girls

Achieving economic empowerment is an essential step towards self-reliance, freedom and independence for rural women and girls and their families. Yet, economic empowerment is not enough to end gender inequality in rural places or elsewhere: structural changes are needed to create sustainable gender relations and allow for women and girls to thrive in equal conditions and to achieve emancipation in every aspect of their lives. It is evident that failing to address the broader set of barriers which perpetuates discrimination and gender inequality will continue to deeply harm rural women, also starting at early ages and impacting the present and the future of rural girls.

For instance, in far too many parts of the globe, rural girls have their education affected and often interrupted due to child marriage, teenage pregnancy, lack of transportation, or due to physical and sexual violence at home, in the schools or on the way to schools. Despite progress made in some regions, such structural gender barriers still prevail in many impoverished rural areas, jeopardizing the full development of rural girls, the whole exercise of their childhood, and essentially, their ability to enjoy equal conditions and opportunities to exercise their human rights. There are many ways to provoke change and start achieving concrete progress to end gender inequality and improve the lives of rural women and girls:

- Use effective tools to raise awareness for gender equality with all members of the communities and make special efforts to involve the most marginalized in such conversations.
- Provide training on gender quality, participation and communication skills for women in rural regions to promote women's leadership in public spaces and decision-making fora in their communities.
- Remove existing objective barriers for women and girls to be able to access equal opportunities for employment, tools, seeds and other resources needed for their work; all levels of education in their preferred language; safe transportation; technology; and all ranges of health care services — including psychological support and sexual and reproductive health; and other services, including childcare and employment benefits.
- Incorporate gender equality in schools' curriculum, train teachers to encourage girls and boys equally throughout their studies, and provide training for experienced and young women in less traditional jobs.
- Foster economic opportunities for rural women by improving their knowledge of agricultural technologies and offering a wide-range of skills training in their own communities.
- Promote sustainable agriculture practices to ensure food security and safety, and as a means to promote the development of rural areas. In addition, support agriculture so it can continue to be an attractive and viable option for young people.

Conclusion

In absolute contradiction with the factual level of importance of the rural sector to feed the entire human population, the mainstream conduct towards these regions and residents have been of absolute neglect. As a consequence, when compared to urban women, rural women and girls living in impoverished areas carry yet an extra layer of vulnerability which often prevents them even further from fully contributing with the development of their community and country. In this two-fold context, the eradication of poverty can only happen if the empowerment of rural communities comes together with the empowerment of rural women and girls.
