

**The empowerment of rural women and their role
in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges**

Chair's summary

At its fifty-sixth session in 2012, the priority theme of the Commission on the Status of Women was “The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges”. Consideration of this priority theme was especially timely given the global context of the financial and economic crisis, and the volatile food and energy prices, that are exacerbating the disadvantages and inequalities faced by rural women and girls. It also provided a timely opportunity to contribute to the deliberations at the upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012.

The Commission held a high-level round table and two panel discussions on the theme. Moderators' summaries are contained in documents E/CN.6/2012/CRP.3, E/CN.6/2012/CRP.4 and E/CN.6/2012/CRP.5 and are available on the Commission's website.

The outcome of the discussion of the Commission on the Status of Women on its priority theme is usually in the form of agreed conclusions, negotiated by all States. Agreed conclusions make action-oriented recommendations for all Member States, relevant intergovernmental bodies, entities of the United Nations system and other stakeholders, in order to accelerate the implementation of previous commitments. Agreed conclusions are made widely available, and distributed among Member States, the United Nations system, civil society and other stakeholders.

As has been the practice of the Commission, the Bureau had prepared a proposal for the agreed conclusions which served as the basis for negotiations. Many additional key issues and recommendations were advanced by Member States aimed at accelerating the empowerment of rural women. However, after many hours of deliberations and negotiations

The promotion and protection of, and respect for, the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women, including the right to development, which are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, should be mainstreamed into all policies and programmes aimed at the eradication of poverty. Measures should be taken to ensure that every person is entitled to participate in, contribute to and enjoy political, economic, social, and cultural development.

Rural women are recognized as, inter alia, leaders, decision-makers, producers, workers, entrepreneurs and caregivers. Their contributions to local and national economies, agriculture, including farming, pastoralism, fishing, and forestry, and household livelihoods must be fully acknowledged and appropriately valued since they are prerequisites for their empowerment as well as for inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development. Investing in rural women and girls accelerates progress toward eradicating poverty and hunger, improving health outcomes, and achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

In recognition of the need to eliminate all forms of discrimination against rural women and girls, it is necessary to address the inequalities and multiple disadvantages that they face, and to promote equal treatment of rural women, irrespective of their sex, age, marital status, race, disability, because they are indigenous women, or are women living with HIV and AIDS, and other factors.

Investment in and strengthening of efforts are encouraged in order to meet the basic needs of rural girls

The full integration of women into the formal economy, in particular, into economic decision-making, means changing the current gender-based division of labour, into new economic structures where women and men enjoy equal treatment, pay and power, including sharing of paid and unpaid work. This is of fundamental importance in achieving sustainable development, sustained economic growth, eradicating poverty and hunger and combating diseases. Investing in the development of women and girls has a multiplier effect, in particular on productivity and efficiency, in all sectors of the economy.

Substantial additional investment, supportive policies and enhanced regional and international cooperation are necessary in support of sustainable agricultural development, while special attention should be paid to the role rural women can play in reaching the poverty and hunger eradication targets of the Millennium Development Goals.

There is deep concern about the pervasiveness of violence against women and girls in all its forms and manifestations worldwide, particularly those living in rural and remote areas as they face additional barriers to accessing support and protective services. Violence against women and girls is an impediment to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and prevents them from realizing their full potential in every aspect of life and development.

The crucial role of national machineries for the advancement of women, which should be placed at the highest possible level of government, is recognized, as are the relevant contributions of national human rights institutions where they exist, and the important role of civil society, especially women's organizations, in advancing the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, particularly for women and girls living in rural areas.

Action-oriented recommendations for the empowerment of rural women

The following actions are to be taken, as appropriate, by Governments, at all levels, including local authorities and national machineries for the advancement of women, in cooperation with the relevant entities of the United Nations system, international and regional organizations and international financial institutions, within their respective mandates, as well as civil society, including national human rights institutions where they exist, rural women's organizations, farmers' and producers' organizations, cooperatives, as well as the private sector and other relevant stakeholders:

A. Strengthening gender-responsive policy environments

a. Prioritize rural development and agriculture, as well as integrate and mainstream a gender perspective into rural governance processes, such as policymaking and public administration, and into national development plans, rural development, agricultural and infrastructure policies, programmes and service delivery, with a view to achieve equal access for rural women to productive resources, land, financial and social services, including health, education and social protection, decent work and employment opportunities, and labour-saving technologies;

b. Undertake legislative and administrative reforms to ensure women's equal access to economic resources, including land, credit, science and technology, vocational training, information, communication and markets;

c. Pursue a gender perspective in developing legislation, policies and programmes on internal and international migration to protect and promote the human rights of rural women and girls, including, inter alia, those who are migrant workers, with a view to

n. Expand opportunities for women smallholder farmers to diversify their production and increase their productivity by engaging in commercial farming and entrepreneurship, and promote their access to markets, including for small-scale production and lucrative high-value products;

o. Urge national, regional and international efforts to strengthen the capacity of developing countries, especially their smallholder farmers, in particular rural women, in order to enhance the productivity and nutritional quality of food crops, including through appropriate mechanization in agriculture; promote sustainable agricultural practices; and enhance food security and nutrition-related programmes and policies that take into consideration the specific needs of women and girls;

p. Promote sustainable livelihoods of small agricultural producers, especially rural women, taking into account their disadvantaged position in the global food supply chain;

q. Recognize the critical role and contribution of rural women, including indigenous women, and their traditional knowledge and practices, in the preservation, conservation and sustainable use of traditional crops and biodiversity for present and future generations as an important contribution to food security and nutrition, as well as in the achievement of development goals;

y. Take concrete measures to improve rural women's skills, productivity and employment opportunities through technical, agricultural, vocational education and training;

z. Pursue policies and strategies that improve the functioning of domestic, regional and international markets and ensure equitable access for all to those markets, especially smallholder and women farmers in developing countries; note the importance of non-trade distorting special measures that are consistent with the rules of the World Trade Organization aimed at creating incentives for smallholder farmers in developing countries to enable them to increase their productivity and to compete on a more equal footing in world food markets, and refrain from taking measures that are inconsistent with the rules of the World Trade Organization and that have adverse impacts on global, regional and national food security;

aa. Stress that a universal, rules-based, open and non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system will improve agriculture and rural development in developing countries and contribute to world food security, and urge that national, regional and international strategies promote the participation of farmers, especially smallholder farmers, including women in community, domestic, regional and international markets;

bb. Promote women's equal access to markets, including for small-scale production, through safe and sound infrastructure, new technology, access to and transparency of information, including on up-to-date market pricing and regulations, and where appropriate, public purchase programmes;

cc. Identify and create opportunities to achieve affordable, reliable and safe transportation systems so that rural women and girls can access educational and training facilities and health care, and that rural women can access workplaces and markets;

dd. Establish or expand national social protection systems with a gender perspective to provide basic social protection and social support measures for rural women of all ages, and take measures to ensure sustainable, long-term financial support for such systems, recognizing that social protection floors can provide a systemic base to address poverty and vulnerability;

ee. Ensure that information on social protection measures and benefits is widely available and accessible to rural women;

ff. Raise awareness about, and provide all citizens, including women and girls in rural and remote areas, with access to affordable personal identification documents to facilitate rural women's equal access to productive assets and services and strengthen, in this regard, birth and marriage registration;

family responsibilities for rural women and men, recognizing that the unequal sharing of responsibilities of daily life has a disproportionate impact on women and girls, and on their economic empowerment;

jj. Pursue and promote gender-based approaches for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) founded on data disaggregated by sex and age, taking into account urban-rural realities, in an effort to address the critical differences and the risks of morbidity and mortality from NCDs for women and men, including rural women, given that NCDs can affect women and men differently and that women and girls bear a disproportionate share of the burden of care giving;

kk. Strengthen efforts to close the knowledge gap for rural women and girls on HIV prevention and promote access to treatment, care and support, noting that HIV and AIDS presents a significant challenge to rural development, exacerbates poverty, food insecurity, malnutrition, and lack of education and economic opportunity;

ll. Promote women's and girls' access to formal, non-formal and informal education and training in rural and remote areas, including through compulsory primary education, scholarships, affordable child care facilities, quality distance education, e-learning, tele-education and community radio, and reaffirm the critical role of education in the achievement of poverty eradication and other development goals,

reducing their time and labour burden; facilitate their access to information, technology and other means of communication and services, as well as promote women's involvement, participation and decision-making in scientific and research institutions;

tt. Promote the rights of rural women with disabilities, including by ensuring their access, on an equal basis, to productive employment and decent work, economic and financial resources and disability-sensitive infrastructure and services, in particular in relation to health and education, including through international cooperation, as well as by ensuring that their priorities and needs are fully incorporated into policies and programmes, inter alia, through their participation in decision-making processes;

D. Strengthening participation and leadership in decision-making

uu. Strongly encourage the participation of rural women and women leaders of rural organizations in key decision-making and budget planning and allocation processes, including the integration of a gender perspective in the planning and implementation of rural and agricultural policies and programmes, at all levels of government and within rural institutions, such as farmers' organizations and cooperatives;