



62nd Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, 12 – 23 March 2018 The Netherlands' Civil Society Priorities for the Agreed Conclusions

Rural women make up over a quarter of the total world population and approximately 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries.¹ They are active agents of economic and social change and environmental protection who play crucial roles ensuring food and nutrition security, eradicating rural poverty and improving the well-being of their families. Since 76 per cent of the extreme poor live in rural areas, ensuring rural women's access to productive agricultural resources contributes to decreasing world hunger and poverty, making rural women critical for the achievement of the new Sustainable Development agenda for 2030.² Yet, globally, and with few exceptions, on every gender and development indicator for which data are available, rural women fare worse than rural men and urban women and men,³ as they continue to face serious challenges as a result of gender-based stereotypes and discrimination that deny them equitable access to opportunities, resources, assets and services. It is thus of crucial importance that the 62nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62) will focus on rural women. In preparation for CSW62, members of the Netherlands' civil society identified a set of key issues related to the priority theme - *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls* – which were presented to the Dutch delegation in a series of pitches on 13 February 2018. The present document contains a brief overview of some of the topics discussed. All present reiterate that measures to improve the lives and empowerment of rural women and girls, should be developed in consultation with them and build on their expertise (i.a. as farmers).

Rural Women and Girls: General

Education

Rural girl's and women's access to education and training, including comprehensive sexuality education, is critical for their personal development, empowerment, and the ability to make their own choices about their future and family, and can have a major impact on their potential to access and benefit from income-generating opportunities and improve their overall well-being. Education can be a driver towards better nutrition, improved health, decreased vulnerability to contracting preventable diseases, like HIV/AIDS, reductions in domestic violence, child and forced marriages and early pregnancies. A variety of approaches, including non-formal education, technical and vocational training, agricultural extension services, workplace training, training in new technologies and literacy and numeracy training are needed to address the various challenges rural women face. In addition, information and communication technologies (including mobile and electronic communication, etc.), supported by the right policies and institutional frameworks, can provide rural women with alternative avenues to access information related to their rights, services and resources, and social protection (e.g. identification card registration; laws on land, inheritance, and domestic/gender-based violence; and agriculture, market, health, nutrition information (among other)). The following concrete recommendations may contribute to keeping rural girls in school and should therefore feature in the Agreed Conclusions:

- Establish schools closer to rural communities to reduce the risk of harm to rural girls on their walks to school.
- Ensure sustainable and logistically convenient access to clean water to reduce the double burden of domestic labour. (In Tanzania, a survey found school attendance to be 12 per cent higher for girls in homes located 15 minutes or less from a water source than in homes one hour or more away. Attendance rates for boys appeared to be far less affected by distance from water sources.)⁴
- Invest in household management support, such as child care and labour-saving technologies (e.g. solar cookers).
- Invest in secure internet facilities to provide e-learning and on-line training.
- Invest in sanitary facilities at schools and provide poor rural girls with sanitary products.
- Increase the number of female teachers in rural schools.

¹ IFAD (2016), *Rural Development Report 2016: Fostering Rural Transformation*, Rome: International Fund for Agricultural Development, available here: https://www.ifad.org/documents/30600024/30604583/RDR_WEB.pdf/c734d0c4-fbb1-4507-9b4b-6c432c6f38c3

² World Bank and IMF (2013), *Global Monitoring Report 2013: Rural-Urban Dynamics and the Millennium Development Goals*, Washington: World Bank and IMF, available here: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1327948020811/8401693-1355753354515/8980448-1366123749799/GMR_2013_Full_Report.pdf

³ UN DESA (2015), *The World's Women: Trends and Statistics*, New York: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, available here: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/worldswomen2015_report.pdf

⁴ WHO/Unicef (2010), *Progress on sanitation and drinking water*, Geneva/New York: WHO/Unicef, available here: https://www.unicef.org/publications/index_82419.html

Access to Energy

Men and women differ in the purposes for which they need and use energy, and so do their levels of access to it. Even where infrastructure is physically available, the poor and women are often hindered in the actual access to energy, due to lack of finance, appliances, information, training and education. Moreover, institutional structures often benefit men, who at the household level in many cases, have a stronger decision-making role than women, even over energy products and services that are mostly used by women. To ensure equitable development outcomes of energy interventions, these differences need to be taken into account when developing and implementing policies and programmes. Women's access to energy contributes to poverty reduction. Energy access saves time, when it substitutes manual labour and reduces drudgery of fetching fuel wood and water, tasks typically women are responsible for. It reduces indoor air pollution levels and hence improves health, when polluting energy forms such as wood fuel and kerosene intense stoves are replaced by improved cookstoves. It improves education, as it enables studying after sunset and greater flexibility in the organization of everyday chores. Lastly, energy access creates new opportunities for income generating activities, as products or services can be improved, processes made more efficient, operational costs reduced and working conditions improved. Benefits of a higher income for women reach far beyond the individual. Studies show that women reinvest 90 per cent of their income in their families and communities, while men reinvest only 30 to 40 per cent. Taking women into account in energy interventions means improved energy access. Female-headed households are less likely to have access to energy than male-headed households. Specifically targeting female-headed households therefore means higher levels of energy access. On the adoption rate side of access, appliances (such as stoves) that have been designed in collaboration with women are more likely to be accepted and used by women. Women in energy jobs can improve the energy supply chain effectiveness. Women are part of social networks that differ from those of men and through which they have access to hard-to-reach households. In decision making positions at all levels and branches within the supply chain, the voice of women contributes to more balanced and diverse decisions. Opening up the sector to women in non-traditional jobs increases their chances of income generation and empowerment. The Agreed Conclusions should thus urge stakeholders to implement programmes to improve rural women's access to renewable, sustainable energy. ⁵

Women and the Media

The review theme of CSW62 will be "Participation in and access of women to the media and ICTs and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women," and will look back on the Agreed Conclusions of CSW47. In his report on the review theme, Secretary General Guterres concludes that the ambition of *critical area J Women and the Media of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA)* to increase the access of women to, and participation of women in the media, as well as balanced, non-gender stereotypical imaging of women in the media, is still a far cry from becoming a reality. ⁶ Gender inequality is present both in the content that the media produce, as well as in the positions held by women in the media sector. Women remain strongly underrepresented in the media, with merely 10% of news items featuring women. When they do feature in the media, they are largely portrayed as victims or in gender stereotypical roles, and only very rarely as experts. Additionally, in 73% of all decision-making positions within the field of media, are held by men. ⁷ Especially worrying is a lack of security of women working in the media sector. Women journalists on average face online intimidation three times more often than their male counterparts, which may lead to self-censorship or even to women leaving the profession. In addition: two thirds of women journalists experience intimidation at the workplace. ⁸ This is particularly regrettable since the media can play a key role in diminishing gender inequality. It is therefore imperative that the Agreed Conclusions urge stakeholders to take measures to reduce gender inequality in the media, such as media monitoring, the collection of sex-disaggregated data on the media sector, training of female journalists and establishing databases of female experts for journalists to consult.

⁵ HIVOS (2017), *Women and Energy*, see: <https://www.hivos.org/focal-area/energia?snid=29261>

⁶ ECOSOC (2017), *Report of the Secretary-General: Review of the Implementation of the Agreed Conclusions from the Forty-Seventh Session of the Commission on the Status of Women*, New York: ECSOC, available here: <http://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2018/4>

⁷ WACC (2015), *Who makes the news? Global Media Monitoring Project 2015*, Toronto: WACC, available here: http://cdn.agilitycms.com/who-makes-the-news/imported/reports_2015/highlights/highlights_en.pdf

⁸ IWMF Foundation (2013), *Global Research Project: Harassment and Violence against Female media Workers*, Washington: International News Safety Institute and International Women's Media Foundation, available here: <http://www.iwmf.org/our-research/journalist-safety/>



Conflict Prevention and Resolution

In October 2000, the United Nations Security Council adopted the historic resolution 1325, drawing attention to the differential impact of armed conflict on women, their exclusion from conflict prevention and resolution, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, and the inextricable links between gender equality and international peace and security. In 2010, a report entailing the progress of resolution 1325 at the ten-year mark revealed women's participation in peace negotiations remained low, especially in rural areas. When women do get involved in the peace process it is mostly elite women from the capitals, leaving rural women from the provinces underrepresented.⁹ Four years later, then-Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon released another report on the impact of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and the findings were not too different.¹⁰ It is therefore of crucial importance that the Agreed Conclusions acknowledge the specific lack of representation of rural women in peace negotiations and commit stakeholders to boosting their participation.

Rural Women and Girls and Bodily Self-Determination

Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

SRHR and gender equality are highly related themes; there will be no SRHR for all without gender equality, and there will be no gender equality if there is no SRHR for all. For rural women, existing gender inequalities and barriers in accessing sexual and reproductive health and rights are compounded by living in rural and remote areas. These barriers include but are not limited to: scarce availability of comprehensive, high quality sexual and reproductive health information, education, services and supplies; significant distances to travel to access health care services, education and other social services; vulnerability to sexual and gender based violence and harmful practices; and a disproportionate impact by the gendered impacts of climate change and humanitarian disasters. Situations of crisis exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities. It is especially important to consider the needs of rural girls. In addition to the above mentioned barriers that rural women face, rural girls face increased vulnerabilities due to their age and economic dependence. Specific attention should be paid to rural girls, who are in need of consistently high quality, affordable, confidential and youth-friendly health services. Sexuality education must be standardized on a national level (including in the Netherlands), and be truly comprehensive moving beyond human biology to include important topics such as gender and sexual diversity and different forms of contraceptive methods to ensure that young people are empowered to make informed choices. Furthermore, it is vital that young girls are meaningfully involved in all levels of decision-making as they often have clear ideas of how to change their communities for the better. In sum, the Agreed Conclusions therefore must commit stakeholders to ensure rural women's and girls' universal access to sexual and reproductive health and their reproductive rights, including health-care services for family planning, and safeguard their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

Safe and Legal Abortion

Of all sexual and reproductive health care services, abortion is most contested and has increasingly come under worldwide pressure, resulting in restrictive laws, even in countries such as the Netherlands, where the government in November 2017 decided against rendering the abortion pill Mifepristone available through the GP's practice. This is worrying, as restrictive laws have much less impact on stopping women from ending an unwanted pregnancy than on forcing those who are determined to do so to seek out clandestine means. In countries with such restrictive laws, women who can pay can sometimes find a qualified provider willing to perform an abortion; however, the vast majority of women in developing countries lack the means to avail themselves of this underground network. And especially rural women often have no nearby access to such services. As a result, almost all unsafe abortions occur in the developing world. According to the World Health Organization, unsafe abortion is the cause of 70,000 maternal deaths each year—or 13.2 per cent of pregnancy-related deaths among women. Approximately 7 million more women per year are admitted to hospital as a result of post-abortion complications that can lead to short- or long-term consequences, including anaemia, prolonged weakness, chronic inflammation of the reproductive tract and secondary infertility.¹¹ The Agreed Conclusions should thus commit Member State Parties to ensure access to safe, affordable and legal abortion, and to eliminating other barriers stigma, conscientious objection of health-care providers unnecessary requirements, such as mandatory waiting periods, mandatory counselling, provision of misleading information, third-party authorization and medically unnecessary tests.

⁹ UN DPKO (2010), *Ten-Year Impact Study on Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security in Peacekeeping*, New York: UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, available here: http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/documents/10year_impact_study_1325.pdf

¹⁰ UN SC (2014), *Report of the Secretary General on Women, Peace and Security*, New York: UN Security Council, available here: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2014/693

¹¹ WHO (2018), *Factsheet: Preventing Unsafe Abortion*, Geneva: World Health Organization, available here: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs388/en/>

Men and Boys as Change Agents to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG)

In every part of society, women and girls are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse that cut across income, class and culture. Statistics show that women and girls living in rural areas are confronted with specific risks because of their isolation, limited access to shelter and absent government services. Violence against women and girls violates women's and girls' human rights and fundamental freedoms.¹² In order to eliminate the violence, there is a critical need to address the roles and responsibilities of men of all ages in preventing and ending gender based violence in rural settings, and examine the root causes of violence against all women and girls, including the socialization of men, power, patriarchy and masculinities. As major perpetrators, the target audience for primary prevention, holders of the social norms and influencers of other men, men need to be engaged to reduce and prevent gender-based violence. There is a much broader spectrum of roles for men and boys to play than (potential) perpetrator of gender-based violence. These roles include engaging men as agents of change, not only to prevent and reduce violence against women and girls, but also to free them from the limits and harms of patriarchy and dominant masculinities. The Agreed Conclusions therefore should commit stakeholders to prevent and respond to violence against all women and girls by tackling its root causes. This should i.a. include working with men and boys, to challenge the underlying attitudes and social norms that lead them to commit violence. Well-designed gender-transformative programmes with men and boys that change underlying destructive gender norms are effective in reducing violence against women and girls. These programmes should include comprehensive sexuality education that includes such topics as gender, women's rights and power relations.

Intersecting Forms of Discrimination/SOGIESC

Rural women are not a homogenous group: they may be small farmers with ownership rights, farmers or forest users on collective or common land, waged farmers, workers in secondary and non-farm industries, pastoralists, fishers, and peasants. They also may be girls, parents, widows, indigenous women, women with disabilities, women living with HIV/AIDS or other diseases, and women of diverse sexual orientations and/or gender identities. Acknowledgement of this diversity is crucial for the Agreed Conclusions to have a positive impact on all women, including LGBTI women and gender non-conforming persons. Significant inequality exists between urban and rural women, i.a. with regards to their health, SRHR and access to education.¹³ This may be exacerbated by intersecting forms of discrimination e.g. on the basis of social status, ethnicity, age, religion, position in the household, relationship status, HIV/AIDS status, sexual identity, gender identity or expression. Specific groups of rural women are at risk of exclusion, violence or discrimination. Stereotypical gender norms and roles, as well as discriminatory policies and harmful practices have a disproportionate impact on the position of LGBTI women and other groups and increase poverty in rural areas. The Agreed Conclusions should therefore address the root causes of discrimination and exclusion in order to render the approach to sustainable development truly inclusive. Only then will LGBTI women in rural areas, too, have access to education, housing, adequate health care, security, financial services and paid work.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C)

More than 200 million women globally have undergone Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C). If the current trend continues, the numbers will increase significantly over the next 15 years – especially in rural areas.¹⁴ FGM/C is a violation of women's rights. It causes serious medical complications, but it also leads to major setbacks for girls, such as unfinished education and forced early marriage, preventing them from reaching their full potential. In many communities in Africa, FGM/C is regarded as an important tradition: a rite of passage. A recent report by the UNFPA¹⁵ reconfirms that community-led interventions aimed to promote the empowerment of women and girls can lead to shifting deep-rooted unequal norms and ideas about gender inequality. These interventions can end harmful practices and violence against women, empower young rural women and increase their economic participation. It is important to understand that although improved implementation of laws is crucial, community-led interventions have additional effects that benefits young women, especially in rural and remote communities. We have to work closely with African Communities to support them in developing interventions that respect local traditions and promote the rights of young girls in remote communities in Africa.

¹² WHO (2005), *Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women*, Geneva: World Health Organization, available here: file:///C:/Users/Lisanne/AppData/Local/Packages/Microsoft.MicrosoftEdge_8wekyb3d8bbwe/TempState/Downloads/924159358X_eng.pdf

¹³ UNSC (2017), *Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls*, New York: Secretary General, available here: <http://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2018/3>

¹⁴ UNICEF (2016), *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: a Global Concern*, New York: UN International Child Emergency Fund, available here: https://www.unicef.org/media/files/FGMC_2016_brochure_final_UNICEF_SPREAD.pdf

¹⁵ UNFPA (2017), *Worlds apart. Reproductive Health and Rights in an Age of Inequality*, New York: United Nations Population Fund, available here: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA_PUB_2017_EN_SWOP.pdf



Sexual Harassment in the Rural Workplace

Despite difficulties in documenting the experience of sexual harassment, the results of quantitative and qualitative studies of sexual harassment conducted around the world demonstrate that sexual harassment in the workplace is a serious and pervasive human rights violation. This includes countries like the Netherlands, where a survey by TNO revealed 134.000 victims in 2017.¹⁶ The rise of the #MeToo movement over the past year has helped draw global attention to sexual harassment and assault in the workplace. Still, a lot remains to be done, particularly for women in rural areas, who tend to work in relative isolation and live in smaller communities where patriarchal behaviours and values are often more deeply entrenched. It is important employers understand that the law holds them accountable for the sexual harassment that takes place under their watch. They must also communicate regularly and clearly about workplace sexual harassment policies. In order to achieve this, offering gender-sensitive trainings to employers is known to have a positive impact. Equally, training of personnel helps create a culture in which employees, male and female, feel free to speak up about sexual harassment, as does increasing the number of women in management positions and boards. Lastly, it is of crucial importance that women, including rural women, have access to legal services. As there are still stark discrepancies between judges' interpretations of sexual harassment cases, gender-sensitive trainings would help in offering them and employers the tools to terminate tenures of perpetrators of sexual harassment. The Agreed conclusions should thus call on all State Parties to ensure such access to legal services of all women, develop trainings and implement policies (quota) to increase the number of women in management positions and on boards. Additionally, the Agreed Conclusions ought to call on the ILO and its Member States to draw up an ILO standard on ending gender-based violence and sexual harassment in the work place, which would be a significant step towards improving women's working conditions worldwide while at the same time increasing productivity and decreasing health care costs and sick leave as a direct result of GBV at work

Sex Workers' Rights

While sex work remains controversial, sex workers' human rights and the universality of human rights should not be. Human rights belong to everyone, including sex workers. An integral part of the safeguarding of the human rights of sex workers is letting their voices be heard and having them participate in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies that directly concern and affect them. Another is non-discrimination: sex workers' right to be treated on an equal footing with other citizens and workers. Consequently, the assessment of prostitution policies should be focused on detecting possible negative effects on the human rights of sex workers, including the right to health, privacy, a safe working environment and protection against coercion, intimidation and violence (including violence by the police). Finally, the right to sexual and bodily self-determination, which recently has come increasingly under threat, is absolutely vital. Instead of further criminalization and marginalization, sex workers need recognition of sex work as work and the same human rights and protection as their fellow citizens.

¹⁶ TNO (2017), <https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/tno-tienduizenden-nederlanders-seksueel-geeniuml-ntimideerd-op-het-werk~ab2053ec/>