



**MULTI-STAKEHOLDER FORUM**

**25 January 2018**

**10 am–1 pm and 3-6 pm**

**United Nations Headquarters**

**Conference Building**

**Conference Room 1**

*Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls*

## **CONCEPT NOTE & DISCUSSION GUIDE**

### **INTRODUCTION, OBJECTIVES & FORMAT**

**During the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62), from 12 to 23 March 2018, the Commission will address as its priority theme ‘Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls’. In addition, it will evaluate progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions from the forty-seventh session (2003) on ‘Participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women’.**

Achieving gender equality, the empowerment of rural women and girls and the realization of their human rights are essential for the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other major international commitments. Rural women and girls are disproportionately affected by poverty, unequal access to land and natural resources, infrastructure and services, decent work, economic opportunities and resources, and social protection. They are also affected by the impacts of environmental and climate change. Structural barriers and discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes result in their exclusion from leadership and decision-making, in unequal or limited access to education, health, information and justice systems, and greater risks of violence and harmful practices. They often face multiple and intersecting inequalities and forms of discrimination.

The realization of the human rights of rural women and girls, in both developing and developed countries, is necessary for their livelihoods, well-being and resilience. It requires action to eliminate geographic and gender inequalities in access to essential services and infrastructure, productive resources, land tenure security, food security and nutrition, and income security. Legal and policy reforms, effective macroeconomic, fiscal and labour policies, technological innovations as well as better investments in infrastructure, services and social protection can contribute to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

The Commission is expected to adopt agreed conclusions on the priority theme, with action-oriented recommendations for steps and measures to close remaining gaps and challenges. They should be addressed to Governments and other stakeholders. The Commission’s work strengthens political commitment and galvanizes the accelerated

implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this regard, the priority theme at CSW62 enables the Commission to make a decisive contribution towards ensuring that no one is left behind and that those furthest behind are reached first.

Stakeholders are mobilizing at all levels in preparation for CSW62, and momentum is building towards an interactive and results-oriented session in March. At the global level, efforts are under way to build alliances, strengthen networks and expand multi-stakeholder approaches for greater effectiveness and impact.

## OBJECTIVES

The Multi-Stakeholder Forum will serve to engage a range of stakeholders in the preparations for the sixty-second session of the Commission. More specifically, the Forum will:

- Raise awareness of existing commitments, and identify key areas and issues that should be considered by CSW62 in the context of its priority theme, as well as the ways and means to address them;
- Create a platform for sharing approaches and strategies that bring results and highlighting areas that require enhanced commitments;
- Foster dialogue, build alliances and galvanize partnerships for action in support of gender equality, the empowerment of rural women and girls and the realization of their human rights and for accelerating implementation of the expected outcomes of CSW62.

## PARTICIPANTS

Participation from different stakeholders, in particular Permanent Representatives and Deputy Permanent Representatives and experts from Permanent Missions to the United Nations, as well as representatives from civil society and rural women's organizations, and the United Nations system will facilitate the sharing of a range of perspectives.

## OUTCOME

A report on the Multi-Stakeholder Forum, summarizing the key elements from the discussions and outcome expectations, will be prepared and published on the web, and contribute to the preparations for CSW62. It will also help galvanize stakeholders towards effective implementation of the outcomes of CSW62.

## FORMAT

The Multi-Stakeholder Forum will consist of an opening session; four interactive panel discussions where participants will engage in dialogue, highlight key areas for implementation and commit to further action; and a closing session. The topics of the panel discussions address some of the areas and issues raised in the report of the Secretary-General on the priority theme (E/CN.6/2018/3, forthcoming):

- Ensuring rural women's land rights and tenure security and strengthening food security and nutrition for rural women and girls
- Empowering rural women and girls through quality education and access to information and communications technologies (ICT)
- Ensuring access to healthcare and sexual and reproductive health and rights, and to infrastructure, water and sanitation
- Strengthening laws, policies and programmes to end violence and harmful practices against rural women and girls

The discussions will take place in an interactive format guided by moderators. Four to five participants per panel will be invited to address key questions outlined below. Their interventions will be limited to five minutes each, followed by comments from discussants and participants. Each panelist will also be encouraged to present one concrete result/outcome for CSW62 and her/his contribution and/or commitment towards achieving that outcome.

### DISCUSSION NOTE FOR PANEL 1

#### *Ensuring rural women's land rights and tenure security and strengthening food security and nutrition for rural women and girls*

The rights to land and natural resources are fundamental and for rural women and men, land is perhaps the most important household asset. Yet women farmers have significantly less access to, control over, and ownership of land and other productive assets compared to their male counterparts. In many countries, even if the law guarantees women and men the same rights, rural women's rights to land are compromised by ineffective implementation at national and

local levels, and by discriminatory customary and religious practices. Often women hold secondary rights to land through male family members and risk losing those rights in cases of divorce, widowhood or the migration of male relatives. The lack of inheritance rights and proper documentation of rural land also makes women susceptible to dispossession and displacement.

Gender-responsive legal reforms, asset transfer programmes and land titling can strengthen land tenure security for rural women. Equal inheritance rights between women and men and marital regimes with joint or common property are favourable for women's land rights. Collective land tenure or ownership by women's organizations or farmer cooperatives is another means to increase women's access to, ownership of and control over land and its production. Women's representation at all levels of land governance and administration is also of great importance, and rural women's organizations and civil society can help with awareness raising and reform movements.

Fulfilling the rights of rural women and girls to food and nutrition of adequate quality and quantity is critical. Yet rural women and girls continue to suffer from food insecurity and malnutrition. Globally, women are slightly more likely to experience food insecurity than men. A third of women of reproductive age worldwide suffer from anaemia, threatening their own health and their children's nutrition and health. As rural women farmers are increasingly engaged in sustainable agriculture and methods for food security and nutrition, they need to be formally recognized as producers in their own right, to participate in decision-making in producer cooperatives, land governance, and water management committees. Public and private investment in rural women's producer organizations is necessary to enable climate-resilient, diversified production and commercialization of crops.

#### **PROPOSED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION :**

- What legal and policy reforms have resulted in rural women's equal access to, control over and ownership of land and other productive resources?
- How can government and other actors work with communities to address discriminatory customary laws and practices that curtail women's land and inheritance rights?

- What are examples of national policies that have increased rural women's and girls' access to food and nutrition of adequate quality and quantity?
- What are examples of effective partnerships and multi-stakeholder practices that have strengthened rural women's and girls' voice, leadership and participation and facilitated dialogue with rural women's and civil society organizations?

### **DISCUSSION NOTE FOR PANEL 2**

#### *Empowering rural women and girls through quality education and access to information and communications technologies (ICT)*

Realizing the right of rural women and girls to quality, affordable, and accessible education throughout the life cycle is critical. Despite the gains made in achieving gender parity in primary school enrolment in developing countries, much remains to be done to reach universal primary completion, especially in rural areas. Rural women and girls are at the greatest disadvantage in terms of schooling, literacy, and adult education. Poverty and location are the factors that determine whether girls go to school, with the poorest girls in rural areas at the greatest risk of exclusion from school. Of particular concern for rural girls is the persistent and widespread lack of qualified teachers in rural areas. Greater and more systematic investments are required to achieve universal free public primary and secondary education for all, providing educational facilities with qualified teachers at all levels in rural areas.

Infrastructure and technology, including ICT, tend to reach rural women and girls last, even if vital to enhancing their economic and educational opportunities. Rural women and girls make up the majority of the 3.9 billion people who are offline in rural areas, poorer, and less educated. Ensuring rural women's and girls' access to ICT may help to deliver skills, information, and knowledge that they urgently need for their livelihoods, wellbeing, and resilience. Increased connectivity and mobile phone technology can potentially enhance women's literacy and learning and provide women farmers with information about weather and climate, crop prices and market conditions. Greater investments in gender-responsive technology, including ICT, by Governments and the private sector are necessary for gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

## PROPOSED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION :

- What actions and investments have governments taken that have resulted in rural women's and girls' universal access to and completion of quality and affordable education, at all levels, as well as skills and vocational training?
- How have public, private and non-governmental entities at the local and national levels worked together to ensure that essential infrastructure, including sustainable energy, sustainable transport, safely managed water and sanitation, improve the lives, livelihoods, and resilience of rural women and girls?
- What steps have governments in partnership with other stakeholders taken to ensure that ICT and other technologies reach and benefit rural women and girls for their economic and political empowerment?

### DISCUSSION NOTE FOR PANEL 3

#### Ensuring access to healthcare and sexual and reproductive health and rights, and to infrastructure, water and sanitation

Ensuring access to quality essential healthcare services and universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights are necessary for realizing rural women's and girls' right to the highest attainable standard of health. The lack of access, information, and services about sexual and reproductive health and rights is particularly acute for rural women, especially young women and girls. Maternal deaths, many of which are preventable, are linked to inadequate health services for women and girls, particularly for the poorest and those living in rural areas. Distance from health facilities and qualified health professionals is a serious cause for concern for rural women and girls. Mobile technologies have been helpful in certain cases to provide information to rural women and girls and to train health workers and professionals. Greater investments in quality, affordable and accessible healthcare facilities and support services for rural women and girls can help to promote gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

Infrastructure (sustainable energy, sustainable transport, safely managed water and sanitation) is vital for relieving the disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work of women and girls and enhancing their economic and

educational opportunities. The poorest people in rural areas suffer most from lack of access to water, especially the women and girls who are responsible for collecting it. Rural women and girls are also disproportionately affected by the lack of safe, dignified, and private sanitation facilities. Menstrual hygiene management is also difficult in the absence of water, soap, and sanitation facilities, whether at home, school, or work. Limited access to energy and connectivity has negative educational and economic outcomes in rural areas. Greater investments in gender-responsive rural infrastructure are necessary for gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls. Policies and programmes that prioritize rural women and girls and address critical geographical, gender, and health inequalities are necessary.

## PROPOSED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION :

- What policies and programme measures have resulted in providing affordable and accessible healthcare services for rural women and girls?
- What are examples of national policies and partnerships that have ensured universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in rural areas?
- How can government and other actors work together to enhance rural infrastructure development and ensure rural women's and girls' access to safe and reliable water and sanitation?

### DISCUSSION NOTE FOR PANEL 4

#### Strengthening laws, policies and programmes to end violence and harmful practices against rural women and girls

Violence against women and girls is a significant human rights violation in all countries, occurs in private and public places and takes many forms. Globally, over one-third of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner, or sexual violence by a non-partner. Evidence shows that the prevalence of harmful practices, including child, early, and forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), may be more prevalent in rural areas. These conditions are exacerbated by rural women's and girls' limited access to justice and lack of effective legal, juridical, and institutional remedies.

Urgent action is required to address and prevent all forms of violence and harmful practices against rural women and girls and those subject to violence must be assured access to essential social, health, and justice services. Large-scale public awareness and advocacy initiatives are needed across rural areas to change practices and attitudes about intimate partner violence against women, as well as child, early and forced marriage and FGM, and should target women and girls as well as men and boys. Other preventative measures include increasing girls' and young people's access to education to empower them with knowledge and skills, as well as empowering parents and communities to abandon harmful practices. Economic incentives, such as conditional cash transfers, may be effective in reducing child marriage, and increasing girls' attendance in school. Strengthening and enforcing laws and policies on violence against women and harmful practices is critical.

#### **PROPOSED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION :**

- What are good practices and lessons learned in preventing violence against rural women and girls and harmful practices, including child, early and forced marriages and FGM?
- What steps have governments in partnership with other actors taken to ensure that rural women and girls victims of violence have access to justice and to effective legal, juridical, and institutional remedies?
- What are examples of effective collaboration of local and national government actors with rural women's and civil society organizations, youth-led organizations, faith-based groups and traditional leaders, as well as men and boys to change attitudes and prevent and end violence against rural women and girls and harmful practices?

