



Expert Group Meeting on
'Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls'
Convened by UN-Women, IFAD, FAO, and WFP
Rome, Italy
20-22 September 2017

CONCEPT NOTE

EGM/RWG/INF.1
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ENGLISH only

I. Background and objectives

1. In accordance with its multi-year programme of work (2017-2020), the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2018 will consider “Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls” as its priority theme. To take stock of current research and assist the Commission in its deliberations, UN-Women will convene an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the priority theme, in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the World Food Programme (WFP), to be held at IFAD Headquarters in Rome, Italy on 20-22 September 2017.
2. With the overall objective of accelerating the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all rural women and girls, the EGM will assess three broad, interlinked areas that are critical for rural women’s and girls’ livelihoods, wellbeing, and climate resilience in the context of rural transformation:
 - Rights to an adequate standard of living and ensuring income security and social protection
 - Rights to food and ensuring food security and nutrition
 - Rights to land and productive resources and ensuring land tenure security
3. The EGM will, *inter alia*:
 - Explore the possibilities of emerging opportunities and new challenges for the empowerment of rural women and girls in the context of the processes and consequences of rural transformation, including migration, development of meso rural-urban areas, and new income-generating opportunities, among others.
 - Examine how rural women’s rights to an adequate standard of living can be achieved through access to climate-resilient livelihoods, labour market participation and self-employment, and decent work and social protection;
 - Analyse how the right to food can be realized to ensure food security and nutrition for the wellbeing and empowerment of rural women and girls, taking into account changes in rural areas and food systems;
 - Identify policies and programmes that increase and secure women's land rights and tenure security as well as their control, ownership, and access to other productive assets and resources, such as energy, water, livestock, housing, financial assets, technologies, enterprises, information and rural advisory services, etc.;
 - Develop action-oriented recommendations that support gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1) to address the challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.
4. The EGM builds on the priority themes of the preceding sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, taking note of the 56th session, which also considered rural women. It

pays particular attention to the multiple and intersecting identities and inequalities that rural women face, as young women and girls, older women, heads of households, indigenous women, women affected by HIV/AIDS, women with disabilities, migrants, refugees and internally-displaced people. The EGM will consider the situation of rural women and girls in different parts of the world and identify examples of successful gender-responsive policies and practices.

II. Global normative and policy frameworks

5. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the crucial importance of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 and as essential for achieving all the interconnected and mutually dependent goals and targets. In view of the urgency of leaving no one behind, the Agenda represents a comprehensive and transformative framework that clearly links the gender equality and empowerment of rural women and girls to other goals and targets, *inter alia*, ending poverty in all its forms (SDG 1), eradicating hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture (SDG 2), achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all (SDG 8), and taking action to combat climate change (SDG 13).
6. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) remains the only international human rights treaty with a specific article, Article 14, dedicated to the situation of rural women. It calls on State Parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against rural women in a number of areas. Its General Recommendation 34 on the rights of rural women emphasizes their rights to land and natural resources, and explicitly recommends that States uphold rural women's rights to, *inter alia*, social protection, food, health, education, employment, housing, water, sanitation, energy and participation, as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights. These rights and others critical for rural women and girls are enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,¹ among others.
7. The Beijing Platform for Action addresses rural women and girls across the 12 critical areas of concern. For example, critical area F, on women in the economy, calls attention to the need to promote and facilitate women's economic rights and independence, and to the key linkages between women's economic empowerment and their voice, agency, and decision-making in the private and public spheres. It highlights the need for policies, strategies and investments to improve the situation of rural women producers, increase their incomes and provide household food security. Measures include facilitating rural women's equal access to resources, employment and training, markets, trade and information and technology; and strengthening their commercial networks and business services. The 20-year review of its implementation in 2015 has brought renewed attention to the situation of rural women and girls, and to the need to accelerate the closing of gender gaps therein (E/CN.6/2015/3).

¹ *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chapter I, resolution I, annexes I and II.

8. In addition, several ILO Conventions address agricultural and rural workers' rights and entitlements. These include, for example, the Plantations Convention, 1958 (No. 110); the Rural Worker's Organisations Convention, 1975 (No. 141); the Rural Worker's Organisations Recommendation, 1975 (No. 149); the Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No.129); and the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169). Additionally, the provisions of the ILO Conventions related to gender equality apply to rural woman and girls, including the Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156) and Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183).
9. The outcome documents of major global conferences – such as the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the third United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (A/RES/66/288), the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the third International Conference on Financing for Development (A/RES/69/313), and the Istanbul Programme for Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 (A/CONF.219/3) – also recognize the need for increased attention to rural areas, and reiterate the importance of empowering rural women as critical agents for enhancing agricultural and rural development and food security and nutrition.
10. The United Nations Rome-based agencies, FAO, IFAD, and WFP, have special mandates that cover agriculture, rural development, and food security and nutrition among other areas. Many recent initiatives have brought new attention to the important roles of rural women in agricultural production, addressing food and nutrition insecurity and promoting broad-based poverty reduction worldwide. Examples of such measures include the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (2012) and the Voluntary Guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security (2005).
11. In its deliberations, the EGM will be informed by the work undertaken during the 2017 High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, focusing on eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world, and the Secretary General's report on Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (E/2017/66), as well as during the High Level Event on “Step it Up together with Rural Women to End Hunger and Poverty,” organized by FAO, the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Commission, held at FAO Headquarters on 16 December 2016.

III. The situation of women and girls in rural areas

12. The world is increasingly urbanized yet 46 per cent of the world's population is still rural.² Rural areas continue to be affected by slow or stagnant economic growth, unstable food prices and demand, extreme weather events, and worsening political and violent conflict. The dynamics of urbanization, demographic change, globalizing agrifood value chains, unsustainable agricultural practices and increasing large-scale domestic and foreign

² World Bank Staff estimates for 2015 based on United Nations, World Urbanization Prospects: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS>

investment in land, biofuels, and the agrifood sector generate new risks for rural women and men. It is estimated that the world's 1 billion people who continue to live in unacceptable conditions of poverty are heavily concentrated in rural areas and are predominantly smallholder farmers and agricultural workers. Globally, with few exceptions, every gender and development indicator for which data are available reveals that rural women fare worse than rural men and urban women, and that they disproportionately experience poverty, exclusion and the effects of climate change.³

13. Despite their contributions to rural development in both developing and developed countries, rural women and girls' rights and priorities remain insufficiently realized in the implementation of legal frameworks, development policies and investment strategies at all levels. Rural women are under-represented in local and national institutions and governance mechanisms, and tend to have less decision-making power in the household and in society more broadly. Rural women and girls continue to face serious challenges in carrying out their multiple productive and reproductive roles within their families and communities; much of their labour remains unpaid and unrecognized, including their disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, upon which their households and local economies depend. At the same time, new opportunities have emerged for rural women's economic empowerment and income generation, including through agrifood value chains, and for their political empowerment through collective action and social movements.⁴

IV. Critical issues

A. Rights to an adequate standard of living and ensuring income security and social protection⁵

14. Of the approximately 1.1 billion people engaged in agriculture, 300-500 million are waged workers who are critical for global food security but are themselves at risk of hunger. In many countries, their rights to an adequate standard of living are jeopardized by the absence or limited access to income security and social protection, particularly in the case of women, young people, migrant workers and indigenous and tribal peoples. Full and productive employment and decent work in rural areas remains a key global challenge given that the majority of rural jobs are in the informal economy, and comprise over 38 per cent of employment in low- and middle-income countries. Decent work deficits faced by rural workers, particularly women and youth, include low-paid, poor-quality jobs that are

³ FAO, *State of Food and Agriculture: Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security* (Rome, 2016), p. 49.

⁴ IFAD, *Rural Development Report 2016: Fostering inclusive rural transformation* (Rome, 2016).

⁵ The terms social security and social protection tend to be employed interchangeably. Social protection is intended to alleviate: lack of work income (or insufficient income), caused by illness, disability, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, old age, or death of a family member; lack of access to health care; insufficient family support, particularly for children and adult dependents; general poverty and social exclusion. Social protection measures include: cash transfer schemes, public work programmes, unemployment insurance, disability benefits, non-contributory pensions, food vouchers and food transfers, user fee exemptions for health care or education, school stipends and feeding, subsidized services. Please see: Magdalena Sepulveda and Carly Nyst, *The Human Rights Approach to Social Protection* (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2012).

unrecognized and unprotected, absence of the right to work and rights at work, inadequate social protection schemes, and the lack of representative voice and agency.⁶

15. Agricultural work remains significant for rural women. A quarter of the world's women workers are engaged in agriculture, constituting about 45 per cent of agricultural workers globally. Yet the share of women in agriculture is only 9.5 per cent in upper-middle-income countries and 2.6 per cent in high-income countries. In South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, however, over 60 per cent of all working women remain in agriculture, concentrated in time- and labour-intensive, informal and poorly paid activities. Gender discrimination and occupational segregation perpetuate the gender wage gap and inhibit upward mobility for women workers. The pay gap between men and women doing the same work can be as high as 40 per cent.⁷
16. Rural women workers include migrants within and across national borders, trafficked workers, those in situations of forced labour and debt bondage. Child labour is prevalent in rural areas and girl child workers form a significant part of the agricultural workforce. Women rural workers are largely engaged in low-paid, labour-intensive work under difficult working conditions, and are often not covered by national labour standards in law or in practice and have little or no social protection.⁸
17. Social protection programmes, if properly designed and implemented, can help women in rural households build and protect their assets by preventing distress sales of those assets in the case of external shocks. Guaranteed public employment schemes can support income security and establish minimum wages. Social transfers in cash or in-kind can help keep children in school and reduce child labour. A Social Protection Floor can provide minimum income security, including for children and the elderly, essential health care services, including maternal health care, maternity benefits, and disability benefits, among others.⁹
18. In particular, fulfilling SDG 8 on full and productive employment and decent work for all with social protection is critical for achieving an adequate standard of living for rural women and girls, as well as for enabling their agency, wellbeing and empowerment.

B. *Rights to food and ensuring food security and nutrition*

19. "The human right to adequate food is of crucial importance for the enjoyment of all rights" (E/C.12/1999/5). It is now widely acknowledged that rural women play a critical role in supporting their households and communities in the achievement of food and nutrition security, in improving rural livelihoods and in generating income and overall well-being.

⁶ IFAD, Rural Development Report 2016: Fostering inclusive rural transformation (Rome, 2016); FAO, "Rural employment guidelines material #1: Guidance on how to address rural employment and decent work concerns in FAO country activities" (Rome, 2011).

⁷ ILO, *Women at Work: Trends 2016* (Geneva, 2016); Marzia Fontana and Cristina Paciello, *Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways out of Poverty — A Global Perspective* (Rome, 2010).

⁸ ILO, *Freedom of Association for Women Rural Workers* (Geneva, 2012).

⁹ ILO, "Supporting Rural Development through Social Protection Floors" (Geneva, 2011).

Yet rural women and girls may suffer disproportionately from food insecurity and the triple burden of malnutrition (undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and overweight and obesity). The latest estimates indicate that 795 million people were undernourished globally in 2014-2016, with insufficient food for an active and healthy life, down 167 million over the last decade, and 216 million less than in 1990–92. In the developing world, the share of undernourished people in the total population decreased from 23.3 percent in 1990–92 to 12.9 per cent, but with significant regional variations.¹⁰

20. However, eradicating hunger remains a major global challenge. The growth of one out of four children worldwide is stunted, which is evidence of long-term undernutrition that compromises mental and physical development. Nearly half of all deaths of children under the age of five are attributable to undernutrition.¹¹ Anaemia, caused by poor nutrition and deficiencies of iron and other micronutrients, affects 42 per cent of all pregnant women globally and contributes to maternal mortality and low birth weight. However, limitations of national and global data sets mean there is very little information on the gender dimensions of hunger and malnutrition. Data gaps pose a major obstacle to gender analysis and for the monitoring of food security and nutrition (A/69/156).
21. FAO's Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) is a promising development in this regard. It can assess differences in food security between women and men, including those due to intra-household dynamics of gender-based resource allocation and feeding priorities. Preliminary results from the application of FIES indicate that women are more likely to be food insecure than men in 26 per cent of 117 countries, and men in 12 per cent of countries. The association between gender and food insecurity is more evident in developing countries, where women are more likely than men to be food insecure in 39 per cent and men in 13 per cent.¹²
22. The 2030 Agenda addresses the structural barriers that place rural women and girls at a disadvantage in their realization of food security and adequate nutrition in rural areas. The SDGs, in particular SDG2, recognize the need to invest in smallholder women and men as critical to increasing food security and nutrition for the poorest, facilitating sustainable and diversified food production and consumption, and recognizing, protecting and promoting the rights of women and girls to food of sufficient quality and quantity to meet their nutritional needs for an active and healthy life.

C. Rights to land and productive resources and ensuring land tenure security

23. For rural women and men, rights to land and productive resources are fundamental. Land is perhaps the most important household asset to support production and provide for food, nutrition and income security. Yet women's rights to land are compromised by structural barriers, inadequate legal and policy frameworks, and discriminatory social and cultural norms that limit their control and ownership of land and other productive resources.

¹⁰ FAO, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015* (Rome, 2015).

¹¹ <http://data.unicef.org/topic/nutrition/malnutrition/#>

¹² United Nations Statistical Division, *The World's Women 2015: Trends and Statistics* (New York, 2015); <http://www.fao.org/in-action/voices-of-the-hungry/fies/en/>.

Women and men have equal rights to own, use, and control land in only 37 per cent of 161 countries. In 59 per cent of those countries, the law guarantees women and men the same land rights; however, customary, traditional and religious practices discriminate against women and undermine the full implementation of the law. In four per cent of those countries, women explicitly have no legal right to own, use or control land.¹³ Not only do women have less access to land than men, but they are also often restricted to so-called secondary land rights, meaning that they hold such rights through male family members and thus risk losing those entitlements in the case of divorce, widowhood or the migration of the male relative.¹⁴

24. The impacts of climate change on access to productive and natural resources amplify existing gender inequalities. Climate change affects women's and men's assets and well-being differently in terms of agricultural production, food security, health, water and energy resources, climate-induced migration and conflict, and climate-related natural disasters.¹⁵ Women's dependence on and unequal access to land, water, and other productive resources and assets – which are compounded by limited mobility and decision-making power in many contexts – mean that they are disproportionately affected by climate change. In addition, women and girls typically carry the largest burden of unpaid care and domestic work – women spend on average 2.5 times more time than men on unpaid domestic and care work¹⁶ – which only increases in a changing climate. Women often have primary responsibility for water and fuel provisioning; thus changes in their availability due to climate-induced drought and scarcity affect the time and level of effort required to collect, secure, distribute and store these resources.
25. Women are also powerful agents of change to confront land and resource insecurity and climate change, and in building household and community resilience and responding to climate-related disasters. Women as economic and political actors can influence policies and institutions towards greater provision of public goods, such as energy, water and sanitation, and social infrastructure, which tend to matter more to women and support climate resilient livelihoods.¹⁷
26. The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security embrace gender equality as one of the main guiding principles of implementation and stress the importance of compliance in all programmes, policies and technical assistance to improve governance of tenure. The Committee on World Food Security's Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (CFS 2014/41/4 Rev.1) affirm the need for “advancing women's equal tenure rights, and their equal access to and control over productive land,

¹³ OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index (2014).

¹⁴ FAO, “Gender and land rights”, Economic and Social Perspectives Policy Brief No. 8 (Rome, 2010).

¹⁵ A.H.X. Goh, “A literature review of the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change on women's and men's assets and well-being in developing countries,” CAPRI Working Paper No. 106 (Washington, D.C.: International Food Policy Research Institute, 2012).

¹⁶ UN-Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2015 — 2016: Transforming economies, realizing rights* (New York, 2015).

¹⁷ UN-Women, *Leveraging Co-Benefits between Gender Equality and Climate Action for Sustainable Development* (New York, 2016).

natural resources, inputs, productive tools” and further “promoting access to extension, advisory, and financial services, education, training, markets, and information.”

27. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to reach seven targets and six indicators on land rights and tenure security across the SDGs, and to contribute to measuring and monitoring progress through sex-disaggregated data. Three indicators will be particularly critical to guaranteeing women’s land rights and tenure security, that is, SDG 1.4.2 on secure land rights; SDG 5.a.1 on rights over agricultural land; and SDG 5.a.2 on legal frameworks, including customary law, that guarantee women’s equal rights to land and/or control over land.

V. Profile of participants

28. The EGM will be attended by approximately 20 experts in the field, appointed by the Under Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-Women. In selecting the experts, the criteria of geographical balance will be taken into consideration. Experts will include academics and practitioners from relevant fields, as well as representatives from networks and associations, in accordance with the objectives identified above. UN-Women will provide travel and daily subsistence allowance to appointed experts.
29. Observers from the United Nations system, inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and academia are welcome to attend the EGM on prior approval by UN-Women and at their own expense.

VI. Documentation

30. The documentation for the meeting will include:
 - *Expert papers*: Short written contributions prepared by experts on specific issues in line with their expertise
 - *Background papers* (in draft) commissioned by UN-Women as follows:
 1. "Rural women’s empowerment in nutrition: some proposed diagnostics linking the domains of food, health and work," by Marzia Fontana, Sudha Narayanan, and Erin Lentz.

This background paper explores the concept of women’s nutritional empowerment and develops a framework for its operationalization. It specifically focuses on the nutritional outcomes of women themselves, rather than on their children. The framework includes the domains of food, health and work and articulates their multiple linkages. It draws on quantitative and qualitative data from Bangladesh and India but, with further validation, could have wider applicability. The emphasis on nutritional empowerment addresses an important gap in both literature and policy practice relating to gender equality, sustainable agriculture and food security. Interventions to enhance agricultural productivity and food production do not always translate into improved nutritional outcomes. In particular, development interventions claiming to promote women’s economic empowerment but focusing exclusively on income-generating opportunities and increasing agricultural

productivity may inadvertently increase their work burden (both on farm and off-farm, paid and unpaid) and undermine their health and nutrition. The paper aims to identify the full set of constraints, structural factors and norms that may prevent rural women from achieving adequate nutritional outcomes and to develop tools to assess the relative weight of these factors in different contexts. The paper intends to provide the basis for a gender and nutrition diagnostic tool to support efforts to promote well-targeted policies for nutritional security and health, specifically of rural women.

2. "Control and Ownership of Assets: A Means for Increasing Gender Equality and Empowerment of Rural Women," by Abena Oduro.

This background paper explores the evidence on women's asset ownership (land, housing, livestock, businesses, consumer durables, financial assets) and the associated factors. The paper discusses the relationship between women's asset ownership and their bargaining power in the household. This is a nuanced relationship as is evident in the relationship between women's asset ownership, decision-making power, and the incidence of intimate partner violence. The paper also examines the evidence on the relationship between women's asset ownership and access to credit and the ability to cope with shocks. It also explores the relationship between women's asset ownership and the well-being of children – their nutrition and schooling. The final section of the paper examines the ways in which women's asset ownership can be increased, particularly in rural areas. It will review the experience of rural development and women's economic empowerment programmes designed to improve women's asset ownership, the challenges that these programmes faced, and the possibilities for creating enabling environments for increased control and ownership of assets by rural women.

VII. Organization

31. The EGM will be convened by UN-Women, IFAD, FAO, and WFP on 20-22 September 2017. The meeting will be held at IFAD Headquarters in Rome, Italy.
- The EGM will be conducted in English and all documentation will be in English.
- The EGM will meet in plenary and in working groups. Plenary presentations by experts will create the framework for discussions. Experts will meet in small working groups to discuss specific themes and draft concrete recommendations targeted at various stakeholders. The recommendations of working groups will be reviewed and finalized in plenary.
- Two co-chairs will be appointed by the experts at the beginning of the EGM to oversee the meeting and the preparation of the EGM report.

VIII. Expected Outcomes

32. The outcome of the EGM will be a report, containing a summary of the discussion and recommendations directed at Member States and other stakeholders. The report will be made available at the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women and on the website of UN-Women.