

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

**Multi-Stakeholder Forum
25 January 2018**

**United Nations Headquarters
Report**

About CSW

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. A functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), it was established by Council resolution 11(II) of 21 June 1946.

The Commission has been instrumental in promoting women's rights, documenting the reality of women's lives throughout the world, shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women, and encouraging the United Nations system to integrate a gender perspective in all areas of work.

During the Commission's annual two-week session, representatives of Member States, civil society organizations and entities of the United Nations system gather at United Nations Headquarters in New York. They discuss progress and gaps in the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the key global policy document on gender equality, as well as emerging issues that affect gender equality and the empowerment of women. Member States agree on further action to be taken to accelerate progress and promote women's enjoyment of their rights in political, economic and social fields.

UN-Women supports all aspects of the work of the Commission. The Entity prepares the documentation for the session including forward-looking recommendations to further expand the global normative framework. It supports Member States in their deliberations and helps them reach consensus on further actions to be taken. And it supports Member States, at the national level, to follow-up and implement commitments made and agreements reached on gender equality and women's empowerment. UN-Women also facilitates the participation of civil society representatives in Commission meetings.

At its sixty-second session, from 12 to 23 March 2018 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, the Commission will discuss the following themes:

- Priority theme: "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls"
- Review theme: "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"

For more information, please visit: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw62-2018>

Summary

On 25 January 2018, UN-Women convened a Multi-Stakeholder Forum on '*Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls*'. The purpose of the Forum was to engage a range of stakeholders in the preparations for the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62).

More specifically, the Forum aimed to 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; and 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.

The Multi-Stakeholder Forum was opened by Ms. Lakshmi Puri, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UN-Women and Ms. Geraldine Byrne Nason, Chair of CSW62 and Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations. The opening was followed by four interactive panel discussions and a closing session. UN-Women and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) introduced the topics of the panel discussions. Fourteen Permanent Representatives, Deputy Permanent Representatives, as well as representatives from civil society and academia participated as panelists. They engaged in a lively interactive dialogue with participants, highlighting good practices and key areas of further work with regard to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

The Multi-Stakeholder Forum generated momentum around the priority theme of CSW62. Participants voiced confidence that the open exchanges helped build a solid foundation for meaningful discussions at the forthcoming session of the Commission and mobilized stakeholders to engage effectively beyond CSW62 in gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

A number of key messages in four areas emerged from the event:

Panel 1: Ensuring rural women's land rights and tenure security and strengthening food security and nutrition for rural women and girls

Enacting and enforcing laws that prohibit discrimination against rural women and girls are critical to promote their rights to land and tenure security. Targeted actions and policy measures are required to ensure that rural women have access to, control over, and legal ownership/co-ownership of land.

The enforcement of nondiscriminatory laws must be complemented with policies and strategies that address structural barriers, including gender stereotypes, negative social norms, and discriminatory customary and religious practices, that prevent rural women and girls from realizing their rights. National policies and strategies must also address practices that prevent women from owning land, provide women with secondary rights to land, and/or undermine their land rights and tenure security through property grabbing.

Specific measures are required to promote land registration and titling. Land registration and titling can ensure women's tenure security, thereby increasing their bargaining power and participation in decision making processes within their households and in their communities.

The full and effective participation of rural women in decision making processes, particularly in regard to the use and management of land resources, can promote greater food security and nutrition. Perspectives of rural women and girls must be taken into account, and their cooperatives and organizations recognized as key contributors for achieving improved food security and nutrition.

Panel 2: Empowering rural women and girls through quality education and access to information and communications technologies (ICTs)

Due to persistent gender based discrimination and insufficient infrastructure development, rural women and girls face multiple barriers in their attainment of quality education. In many rural areas, the disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work by women and girls can limit girls' enrollment and retention in school, and the absence of adequate and safe sanitation facilities in schools, often result in parents keeping girls at home.

National policies and strategies must ensure rural women's and girls' equal access to and retention in education, including through increased financial investments in infrastructure, and water and sanitation services. Policy interventions must include coordinated approaches with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders. Efforts must also be undertaken to provide skills and training to women and young women who have dropped out of school, and to engage men in family caring responsibilities.

Access to ICTs is critical for the empowerment of rural women and girls. ICTs can provide rural women and girls with access to information for education and professional purposes, and can enable them to create and grow businesses. However, many rural areas still lack access to ICTs and the gender digital divide continues to widen, leaving many women and girls behind.

Increased investments are needed for women's and girls' access to and participation in ICTs. Multi-stakeholder partnerships can be used to address specific challenges in expanding access to ICTs in rural areas and to exchange best practices on how to improve women's and girls' access. Partnerships between national governments, the private sector, mass media, civil society and academia can produce innovative ways to provide access to ICTs in rural areas where traditional infrastructural projects may be difficult or costly to build. Such partnerships can also be used for practical exchanges on how to improve rural women's and girls' access to ICTs.

Panel 3: Ensuring access to healthcare and sexual and reproductive health and rights, and to infrastructure, water and sanitation

In rural areas, women and girls often lack access to healthcare and sexual and reproductive health services. Accelerated action is needed to improve rural women's and girls' access to adequate services, and address distance to health facilities and qualified health professionals, including as a part of efforts to reduce maternal mortality. Civil society organizations are key partners in promoting increased access to health care services for rural women and girls.

Rural women and girls are disproportionately affected by the lack of infrastructure, and water and sanitation. Without access to safe drinking water, rural women and girls spend hours per day collecting water, which can inhibit their completion of, or progress in education and entry or advancement in paid, decent work. The lack of infrastructure, and of water and sanitation facilities also makes it very difficult for rural women and girls to have good menstrual hygiene management, whether at home, school, or work.

Improved infrastructure, water and sanitation can contribute to the empowerment of rural women and girls through, improved health across the life cycle, reducing unpaid care and domestic work and improving retention in school, among other areas. Accelerated action is required to change the perceptions of rural communities toward the use of water and sanitation facilities. In this regard, multi-stakeholder partnerships, including public-private partnerships, are important for gender-responsive infrastructure, sanitation and programmes that empower rural women and girls. A holistic and comprehensive approach to the gender-sensitive management of natural resources is key to ensuring sustainable access to safe and reliable water and sanitation.

Greater investments in gender-responsive rural infrastructure are necessary for the empowerment of rural women and girls. Listening to diverse voices of rural women and girls and promoting their active participation in community planning and decision making is crucial. Public infrastructure is essential to meet the needs of women and girls, can play an important role in setting and shaping norms and expectations, and can promote positive attitudes toward the rights of women.

Panel 4: Strengthening laws, policies and programmes to address violence and harmful practices against rural women and girls

Women and girls in rural areas experience higher rates of violence, including sexual violence and harmful practices, compared to women and girls living in urban areas. Harmful practices, including child, early and forced marriage, raise school drop-out rates and increase the potential of experiencing violence in the future. The high incidence of violence against rural women and girls is compounded by limited access to justice and legal remedies. Accelerated action is needed to ensure access to social, health and justice services for rural women and girls that experience violence.

Targeted actions and policy measures must be adopted and implemented to eliminate violence against rural women and girls. Actions should take a holistic approach and include prevention, protection and support services and responses, and must be adapted to meet local needs. All relevant national stakeholders must be involved in coordinated efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls, including national mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, national human rights institutions, and civil society organizations, among others.

Eliminating violence against women and girls also requires engaging communities through public awareness measures. Men and boys are key stakeholders and critical agents of change in eliminating violence against women and girls. Governments have engaged men and boys at the community level through education campaigns to promote an understanding of human rights and to address gender-based stereotypes. Governments and other stakeholders have also used campaigns and other advocacy measures to effectively engage traditional leaders, civil society and non-governmental organizations to eliminate harmful practices.

Annex 1: Programme of the Multi-Stakeholder Forum

A. OPENING SESSION

Ms. Lakshmi Puri, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director, UN-Women

H.E. Ms. Geraldine Byrne Nason, Chair of CSW62 and Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations

B. PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Panel Discussion 1: Ensuring rural women's land rights and tenure security and strengthening food security and nutrition for rural women and girls

Moderator: H.E. Ms. María Emma Mejía Vélez, Permanent Representative of Colombia to the United Nations

Panelists:

H.E. Mr. Jürg Lauber, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations

H.E. Mrs. Valentine Rugwabiza, Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the United Nations

H.E. Mr. Einar Gunnarsson, Permanent Representative of Iceland to the United Nations

H.E. Mr. Lot Thauzeni Pansipadana Dzonzi, Deputy Permanent Representative of Malawi to the United Nations

Panel Discussion 2: Empowering rural women and girls through quality education and access to information and communications technologies (ICT)

Moderator: H.E. Ms. Koki Muli Grignon, Deputy Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations, Vice-Chair of CSW62

Panelists:

H.E. Mr. Dian Triansyah Djani, Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations

H.E. Mr. Sven Jürgenson, Permanent Representative of Estonia to the United Nations

H.E. Ms. Nguyen Phuong Nga, Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations

H.E. Mr. Juan Carlos Mendoza García, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations

H.E. Mr. Juergen Schulz, Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations

Panel Discussion 3: Ensuring access to healthcare and sexual and reproductive health and rights, and to infrastructure, water and sanitation

Moderator: Ms. Christine Brautigam, Director, Intergovernmental Support Division, UN-Women

Panelists:

H.E. Mr. Jouni Laaksonen, Deputy Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations

Dr. Isha Ray, Professor, University of California, Berkeley

Ms. Susan O'Malley, Chair, NGO/CSW

Panel Discussion 4: Strengthening laws, policies and programmes to address violence and harmful practices against rural women and girls

Moderator: H.E. Mr. Masud Bin Momen, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations

Panelists:

H.E. Ms. Gillian Bird, Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations

H. E. Mr. Martín García Moritán, Permanent Representative of Argentina to the United Nations

H.E. Ms. Maria Helena Lopes de Jesus Pires, Permanent Representative of Timor-Leste to the United Nations

H.E. Christine Kalamwina, Deputy Permanent Representative of Zambia to the United Nations

Ms. Marina Kumskova, Programme Associate, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)

C. CLOSING SESSION

H.E. Ms. Marie Chatardová, Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the United Nations, President of ECOSOC

Ms. Christine Brautigam, Director, Intergovernmental Support Division, UN-Women