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CSW YOUTH DIALOGUE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Leaving No One Behind: Ensuring the inclusion of girls and young women from rural communities in the implementation and achievement of the SDGs

Sixty Second Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

On 17 March 2018, youth-led and youth-serving networks and organizations, including those from indigenous and rural communities, civil society partners and UN Women came together to host a Youth Dialogue in New York during the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62). The event provided a critical safe space for youth to discuss the persisting challenges brought about by unequal and unjust systems that pose barriers to achieving the full rights and empowerment of young rural women, girls and trans youth. More than 300 youth from diverse geographical regions discussed the needs, realities, lived experiences and visions of young rural women and girls in all their diversity in policy-making, during and beyond CSW62. The space fostered collaboration, enhanced partnerships and strategic networking among diverse groups of young people, thereby strengthening the voices and leadership of young rural women, girls and trans youth in their communities and lives.

In consultation with young women, youth-led and youth-serving networks and organisations, including those from indigenous and rural communities and recognising all genders in all their diversities, the Youth Outcome Document of the CSW Youth Dialogue, makes urgent policy recommendations to ensure inclusion of young women and girls from rural communities in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The theme of *leave no one behind* was considered under eight key areas and their relevance to the empowerment of rural girls and young women:

- Education
- Health
- Violence
- Economic justice
- Environment, climate change and land rights
- Media, ICT, data
- Social norms, stereotypes and culture



- Political participation and agency

The Youth Outcome Document recognizes cross-cutting, systemic barriers that young women and girls face at individual, family, community, political, economic and state levels, including poverty, violence, as well as limited or lack of access to quality education, access to health services and rights. At the same time, it identifies opportunities for community-based, girls and young-women led interventions to address harmful socio-cultural norms, gender based violence, and limited access to services including ICT, political and human rights awareness, and accelerates the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment

The participants of the Youth Dialogue demand States to ensure economic justice by economically empowering young women and girls through meaningful consultation with them to review policies that create an enabling environment and improve access to resources, housing, land and property ownership and economic decision-making at all levels.

A. Education: Young women, girls, trans, and non-binary youth living in rural areas face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and barriers to universal, free, quality education including a lack of qualified teachers and infrastructure, particularly sanitation facilities, access to safe transportation, and their disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work. A lack of human rights education, including comprehensive, evidence-based sexuality education, is a barrier for many girls and young women in and from rural areas. Gender-based violence, as well as harmful practices and norms, sometimes justified on the basis of culture or tradition, contribute to low school enrollment and completion rates. Harmful practices and norms include but are not limited to child, early, and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, gender stereotyping in classrooms, socio-cultural discrimination based on caste, class, religion, ethnicity, physical ability and economic status, and early pregnancies.

Recommendations:

- Recognize and eliminate the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, patriarchal norms, and social expectations that negatively shape girls' educational attainment throughout the life course;
- Guarantee universal access to quality education, and free and compulsory primary and secondary education. Ensure inclusive, equal and non-discriminatory quality education, including human rights and comprehensive sexuality education, for girls, young women, and all young people, and provide necessary infrastructure and resources, including sanitation facilities, safe transportation and educational materials;



- Invest in location-specific and non-traditional education that is intercultural and multilingual, including non-formal education, skills based training, and vocational training; and
- Prevent and eliminate violence, sexual harassment and bullying in educational settings on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression.

B. Health: Young women and girls including trans and non-binary youth living and working in rural areas face multiple and intersecting barriers to the realization of their right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, without distinction of any kind, which is crucial for achieving gender equality and empowering all youth. Geographical marginalization, prohibitive costs of health care services and medicines as well as unequal or limited access to public health care act as barriers to the goal of universal and equitable access to gender-responsive, quality, affordable health services. Systemic discrimination against young people contributes to increased risk of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, substance misuse and addiction.

Recommendations:

- Invest in inclusive, free, accessible, youth-friendly, high quality healthcare systems, including mental health and sexual and reproductive health and rights services in rural areas for all young people;
- Eliminate age and gender discriminatory laws and policies that contribute to violations of girls' and young women's right to health, including spousal and parental consent laws, guardianship laws, and laws that criminalize abortion, HIV status, and labour choices in recognition of CSW58, para 42(x) and ICPD Review Bali Global Youth Declaration, para 3.11.

Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, including universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services, information and education, and recognize that the human rights of young women and girls include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly in all matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, as a contribution to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and the realization of their human rights (based on CSW 62, para 46 (uu));



C. Violence: Across the world, many young women and girls including trans, and non-binary youth in rural contexts face high levels of violence in their everyday lives, including but not limited to intimate partner violence and dating violence, physical and verbal gender-based violence, technology assisted violence, family violence, including physical and humiliating punishment in all settings. Violence has life-long, devastating effects, such as limiting educational attainment and securing livelihood.

Recommendations:

- Eliminate, prevent and respond to all forms of violence against young women and girls, including non-binary and trans youth, in public and private spaces by, inter alia, strengthening laws to prevent and respond to all forms of gender-based discrimination and violence, and implement already existing and ratified conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, ICPT Program of Action, Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Human Rights Council Resolutions and previous CSW Declarations;
- Ensure prevention and response services are well-funded, survivor-centred, free and accessible to young women and girls including non-binary and trans youth living and working in rural areas, and delivered by trained police, social workers and judicial officers;
- Ensure policies and procedures take into account the various forms of violence and harmful practices including inter alia child, early, and forced marriage, sexual violence, online violence, intimate partner violence, coerced labour, rape (including marital rape), violence in educational institutions, violence on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression or sex characteristics, violence enabled by oppressive ideologies including racism and religious fundamentalisms, coerced and forced sterilization, and violence within conflict, post-conflict, and humanitarian settings and the intersectional nature of violence.
- Prevent and eliminate all forms of exploitation, violence and abuse by ensuring, inter alia, respectful gender-just and person-centred assistance and support for youth with disabilities, including through the provision of information and education on how to avoid, recognize and report instances of exploitation, violence and abuse (CRPD Article 16.2).



D. Economic Justice: Lack of decent work, poor or lack of compensation for labour, an unequal burden of unpaid care and domestic work, lack of access to resources, criminalization and restrictions on migration violate the rights of young women and girls including non-binary and trans youth living and working in rural areas. Gaps in legislation and lack of comprehensive legislation to address illicit financial flows (IFF), pursue tax justice and end corporate impunity remain challenges for young people to access critical resources required for services. Disinvestment by governments and their collusion with corporations often disadvantage indigenous and rural communities and endanger their livelihoods. Economic injustice is inextricably linked to and drives other forms of injustices and harmful practices such as sexual harassment in the workplace.

Recommendations:

- Create and implement progressive legislation that addresses the gender pay gap, affirm action policies for young people to access leadership positions at all levels, especially local governance, zero tolerance to violence/sexual harassment policies including decriminalization of sex work;
- Provide increased opportunities that enable young women and girls and trans youth living and working in rural communities to meaningfully participate in the labor market by investing in financial literacy programmes and providing training opportunities that lead to decent and meaningful work, including the ability to unionize and to form cooperatives;
- Provide young people with access to and control over personal finances, bank accounts and credit through legislative reform and public private partnerships, taking into consideration young people in all their diversity, including migrants, refugees and domestic workers; and
- Enact legislation and macroeconomic policies that pursue tax justice, address corporate abuses and stop illicit financial flows (IFFs).

E. Environment, Climate Change and Land Rights: Corporate monopolies and state and non-state land-grabs violate the rights of local populations, ethnic minorities and indigenous communities, impoverishing and dispossessing young women and girls, non-binary and trans youth. The impacts of climate change – drought, floods, air pollution, extreme weather, increased incidence of disease, and growing food and water insecurity – disproportionately affect the world’s 1.3 billion poor people. With services and infrastructure lacking and patriarchal gender norms prevailing, young women and girls living in rural areas



disproportionately shoulder unpaid care and domestic work, including but not limited to fetching water and firewood. This intensifies violations of their rights in various areas including health and education.

Recommendations:

- Adopt and enforce legislation that gives girls and young women equal inheritance rights, as well as rights to property and resources;
- Recognise the rights of indigenous girls and young women to their land, and acknowledge their cultural identity and traditional knowledge;
- Ensure inclusion, meaningful participation and leadership of young women and girls in climate change decision-making processes, with full recognition of the fact that climate change has disproportional impact on girls and young women and that today's youth are the last generation who can solve climate change;
- Ensure access to water and sanitation services and facilities, including in rural areas, and ensure representation within community leadership structures such as water and sanitation management and committees;
- Implement, strengthen or enforce laws that regulate corporations and prevent and protect against abuses and violations of human rights by business enterprises, in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and ensure a safe and enabling environment for young human rights defenders defending their land and territories; and
- Increase resources for implementing Article 12 of the Paris Agreement, which calls for the enhancement of climate change education, training, public awareness, public participation and public access to information for youth.

F. Media, ICT, Data: Young women and girls including non-binary and trans youth living in rural areas often have limited access to affordable, reliable, secure digital connections or technology. Often, their stories are misrepresented by researchers, the media, or development actors.



Recommendations:

- Provide access to affordable digital connections and ICT, specifically mobile technology in rural communities. Additional infrastructural contributions should be made to ensure access to sustainable, reliable energy sources are not subject to private companies artificially controlling prices;
- Ensure a safe online environment where young women and girls can express themselves freely and without violence, and ensure that media is free from harmful gender stereotypes and an active partner in the promotion of gender equality;
- Develop mechanisms of collecting data disaggregated by gender, age, rural/urban location, socio-economic status, ethnic group and language that reflects the realities of young women and girls, non-binary and trans youth living in rural areas
- Implement strong, concrete policies and laws that protect digital spaces from cyber-bullying, harassment, threats, and violence, especially for young women and girls, and prevent the sharing of pictures, videos, and other content, including revenge pornography, without informed consent.

G. Voice, Agency and Participation: Young people living and working in rural contexts are underrepresented or absent from decision-making positions and usually denied the opportunity to either speak for themselves or take part in decision-making. Though young women and girls including trans, and non-binary youth living in rural areas may want to form alliances and associations, this is complicated by corruption, gender-based violence, discrimination and existing bureaucracy in the system that prevents the active and meaningful participation of young women and girls, including trans, and non-binary youth living in rural areas in political processes so as to advance their political interests and views. Lack of freedom of association and assembly, increasing authoritarianism, and the criminalization of human rights defenders also pose barriers to the self-organizing of youth.

Recommendations:

- Implement national and international instruments that ensure young people in all their diversity are meaningfully consulted and represented in leadership and decision-making processes at all levels and in all spaces by implementing gender-just and youth-accountable policy, laws, national action plans, programs and budgets, and reducing the minimum age to hold public office;



- Establish an advisory council or permanent office to the executive branch of government that brings the voices of young people (and especially marginalised persons including indigenous, LGBTQ+ people, those living in rural areas) into policy discussions for ongoing youth participating in government policy;
- Provide support and resources to grassroots human rights defenders, including non-registered charities and feminist/intersectional NGOs, youth-led organisations and networks, and health/socio-legal providers that focus on work supporting young women and girls, including trans, and non-binary youth in rural areas, to participate fully and equally in international forums for advocacy and policy-making, and remove barriers to meaningful participation, such as visa refusals, lack of financial support, and lack of access to leadership skill development and mentorship opportunities;
- Formally initiate meaningful annual youth delegation programmes where delegates are elected through a transparent process to represent youth-led networks and organizations, as well as national youth interests, at the United Nations.

H. Social norms, stereotypes and culture: Patriarchal power relations, social norms and gender stereotypes are the root cause of the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by young women and girls, including trans, and non-binary youth living in rural contexts. Harmful social norms and attitudes act as structural barriers to their empowerment and the realization of their rights, preventing them from equally participating in the educational, economic and political spheres. Culture, tradition and religion are often used in tandem to justify discrimination and harmful practices in rural contexts (as elsewhere). Cultural taboos prevent young people from discussing gender identities, sexual orientation, sexual and reproductive health issues such as menstruation and access to safe and legal abortion.

Recommendations:

- Implement programmes beginning in early childhood to engage boys and young men in challenging harmful, patriarchal masculinities and promoting gender equality;
- Engage a broad range of societal stakeholders and influencers, such as educators, social workers, politicians, media and popular culture figures, and religious, cultural and traditional leaders, as well as faith communities, as allies in challenging patriarchal norms and attitudes and in the promotion of women's rights; and
- Implement public campaigns that challenge gender stereotypes and promote equitable, non-violent masculinities



Conclusion:

With less than 12 years to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, we call upon Member States to continue increasing their political and financial support for girls and young women's rights - ensuring that no one is left behind, no matter where they are from. We call upon Governments to work in consultation with girls and young women and prioritise their leadership, respecting them as rights bearers. To achieve the above recommendations, we call on governments to commit to the removal of structural barriers and elimination of discriminatory gender norms that limit girls' and young women's realization of their rights and empowerment. Finally, we require continued support from and engagement with Member States and UN entities to ensure that youth will meaningfully contribute to and participate in progress towards the achievement of SDG 5: Gender equality.