

## **Multi-Stakeholder Forum 2018**

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

#### **Topic Introduction**

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The topic of the panel 3 is: 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 essential 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.
- Globally, the unmet need for family planning affects the lives of 214 million women in developing countries; rural areas show greater unmet need than urban areas, according to available data for some 77 countries.
- Rural women and girls need the resources and opportunities to manage their own sexual and reproductive health and exercise their reproductive rights, supported in a number of ways, including by comprehensive sexuality education. Otherwise they are at a great disadvantage in terms of attaining an education, earning a living, and enjoying a healthy and productive life.
- Mobile technologies have been helpful in certain cases to provide information to rural women and girls and to train health workers and professionals; however, the persistent digital divide in access and use of these technologies remains a gendered one.
- 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 – already a source of discrimination against women and girls due to social and cultural norms and even taboos – is particularly difficult in the absence of water, soap, and sanitation facilities, whether at home, school, or work.

Likewise, limited access to energy and connectivity has negative educational and economic outcomes in rural areas.

- Infrastructure – namely 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.
- To reverse these trends and truly ensure that no rural woman or girl is left behind will require greater investments and strengthened partnerships for gender-responsive rural infrastructure as well as deliberate gender-responsive policies and programmes that prioritize rural women and girls and redress critical geographical, gender, and health inequalities.
- Increased investments in quality, affordable and accessible healthcare facilities and support services for rural women and girls will also be essential for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

**The panel was asked to consider the following questions:**

- 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?