

Multi-Stakeholder Forum 2018

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

Topic Introduction

Seemin Qayum, OIC Economic Empowerment, UN Women

The topic of the panel 4 is: 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, the elimination of which is highlighted in SDG 5.2. It 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.
- Although data is not available for all countries, of the 48 countries with recent data on physical or sexual violence committed by a husband/partner in the last 12 months, 26 showed higher rates in rural than in urban areas.
- Evidence does show that the prevalence of harmful practices, including child, early, and forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) may be higher 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.
- The incidence of child, early and forced marriage has declined globally. Yet, some 15 million girls annually are married before they reach 18 years of age, many from the poorest households in rural sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.
- Child and early marriage has clear implications for girls' and women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. Further, it compromises their agency and mental wellbeing and increases vulnerability to domestic violence, particularly when it is forced marriage.
- 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.
- Eliminating laws and practices that disadvantage women compared with men in access to land, property, and other productive resources could also help to reduce intimate partner violence as it can increase women's social and political status and offers an avenue to economic justice.

- But this is also about changing behaviour, practices and attitudes that infringe on rural women and girls' rights. To address this, large-scale public awareness and advocacy initiatives are needed across rural areas to change harmful 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.
- We are presented with the challenges and opportunities to realize rural women's and girls' rights to a life free of violence and harmful practices, but this will require strong and deliberate laws, policies, programmes and accountability mechanisms that prevent all forms of violence and harmful practices against rural women and girls. Furthermore, we must uphold the promise to those subject to violence that they will have safe, affordable and quality access to essential social, health, and justice services.

The panel was asked to consider the following questions:

- 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?