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Statement submitted by Ilitha Labantu, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution [1996/31](#).

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Ilitha Labantu, a South African NGO, saw its birth in the township of Gugulethu in Cape Town February 1989. At that time, it was the only organization in any black township of Cape Town providing emotional support, practical advice and education around the problem of violence against women. At the time Ilitha Labantu was the first organisation in South Africa to establish a shelter for abused women in the township for women of colour.

South Africa has prioritised the empowerment of rural women through the mainstreaming of gender as part of a Comprehensive Rural Development Programme headed by the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform.

Although there have been great strides made with regards to women empowerment and development in the rural areas, Ilitha Labantu calls for strategies that include providing access to funding, training, transfer of technology, building partnerships, ensuring food security, access to land as well as monitoring inequality in the redistribution of land focused on rural and township women.

As an organisation, we believe that rural women make major contributions to rural economies by producing and processing food, feeding and caring for families, generating income and contributing to the overall well-being of their households but, in many communities, they face discrimination in access to agricultural assets, education, healthcare and employment, among others, preventing them from fully enjoying their basic rights.

No matter how it is put — socially, economically, politically — girls and women in those areas get a raw deal; for the girl child who is denied education or forced into marriage, the woman who loses her house because her husband has passed away; or for the mother who risks death when she gives life, or the farmer prevented from owning the land she works on.

There is great need to place a strong emphasis on empowering rural women, with the aim of bringing an end to hunger and poverty; gender disparity; as well as violence perpetrated toward women and girls.

In the fight against violence perpetrated towards women and poverty, rural woman and girls are the most affected population with less tools and opportunities to escape.

Despite such initiatives women still face challenges in securing their land rights. Laws and policies at international, regional and local level foster discrimination against women on issues of ownership, access and control of land.

It is essentially recognised that poverty is heavily concentrated in rural areas and that substantial progress towards achieving the SDGs depends heavily on improving agricultural and rural development.

Women's invisible unpaid work

Rural women's amount of time spent collecting water alone significantly impacts on women's employment opportunities. In sub-Saharan Africa, women collectively spend about 40-billion hours a year collecting water. Rural women have responsibility of gathering resources for their household; women spend nearly twice more time doing unpaid domestic work.

The most important obstacles that strategies of rural development and employment generation programs face concerning rural women and their access to decent work is invisible unpaid care work, the unequal sharing of care, and other household responsibilities.

Women's emotional labour which can involve everything from tending to others' feelings to managing family dynamics to preparations of meals is a big issue that's rarely discussed. This work is not acknowledged or paid.

Rural women bear the brunt more as cultural and gender stereotypes promotes household work as women's work; putting them on a disadvantage to having opportunities to pursue education, and or

States should reduce unpaid care work through investment, infrastructure and labour-saving technologies that are focused on household care tasks to help rural women to reconcile work and family responsibilities.

Measures are also needed to increase access to health facilities, education, training and other support services. Unpaid care work should be valued and made visible to policy-makers in order to become the subject of policy attention and investment in rural areas. States should implement policies favourable to burden sharing and challenge gender stereotypes that prevent men from contributing to unpaid care work.

Women and climate change

Women are disproportionately impacted by the negative effects of climate change due to their social roles, discrimination and poverty. Natural disasters and climate change can undermine the health, education and livelihoods of rural women, differently to men.

Rural women are powerful agents of change, we must ensure active participation and consultation of women in environmental planning, financing, budgeting and policy-making processes. Women also have the indigenous knowledge needed to increase food security, prevent environmental degradation and maintain agricultural biodiversity. Rural women must therefore be involved in all aspects of adaptation and mitigation efforts in their communities.

Leadership, decision-making and voice

States should establish quotas and targets for rural women's representation in decision-making positions. When women are engaged in producers and traders' associations, cooperatives, labour councils and financial institutions, they can lobby for their views to be heard, for their needs to be met, and for their rights to be respected.

States should ensure that national laws and policies guarantee rural women's right to land including upon divorce and separation and their right to inheritance in both customary and statutory systems.

Women's access to financial services including savings, insurance and credit is essential to allow them to benefit from economic opportunities in rural areas.

Access to micro-finance can increase women's investment in technologies such as solar panels to generate electricity as well as agricultural technologies to enhance the profitability of their businesses.

Promoting rural women's employment, decent work and social protection

Rural women are crucial for achieving economic, social and environmental changes needed for a sustainable development of agriculture and the rural economy.

We recognize that poverty eradication, full and productive employment and decent work for all, and social integration and protection are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, and that enabling environments to promote these needs to be created at all levels.

States should ensure and expand the equal access to opportunities for employment and decent work in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors.

They should facilitate the transition from the informal to the formal sector including through promoting and strengthening women's economic opportunities in micro and small enterprises, sustainable social enterprises and cooperatives. These enterprises and cooperatives can be established in several different sectors: transport, storage, infrastructure, local service sector, tourism, trade, agribusiness, the rural industry.

In this regard, we acknowledge the importance of efforts to promote the exchange of information and knowledge on decent work for all and job creation, including green jobs initiatives and related skills, and to facilitate the integration of relevant data into national economic and employment policies

Data Collection

Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) represents a unique "knowledge-based social Infrastructure" which can be of great help for women to evade marginalization. It is argued that development cannot be achieved through ICT without taking gender issues into consideration.

ICT can work as a novel opportunity to enhance women's access to information and knowledge, as women are the least educated and marginalized, especially in developing countries.

The need to improve the collection of data disaggregated by sex, age, rural, urban areas as well as gender-sensitive indicators is imperative. The analysis and use of data are critical for gender-responsive policies in rural areas, (design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation).

Increase investments and infrastructure, essential services, indigenous, traditional and new technologies and productive capacities in rural areas to reduce rural women's unpaid care work and enhance their sustainable livelihoods. Recognise and support women as actors in climate change adaptation, mitigation, disaster risk reduction, and resilience strategies (protection of water, food, fuel energy, and livelihoods).

Strengthen gender-responsive accountability mechanisms to ensure that rural women and their organisations can influence policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring at all levels of government with a view to enabling rural women to hold all duty bearers to account. Prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against rural women and girls including harmful practices.