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Statement submitted by Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan, 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

Strengthening an enabling environment for rural women's organizations

It is important to strengthen local women's ownership of development in rural areas and to strengthen the role of rural women's rights organizations in advancing women's rights and gender equality in local governance. Today, in developing countries, rural women face serious challenges. It is women's rights organizations that are agents of transformation. But, they need space and significant support and resources to become powerful and equal development partners. Creating an enabling environment for women's groups impacts on changing local governance attitudes to women's agenda.

Rural women continue to face discriminatory attitudes and practices, unequal division of labor and responsibilities within households, unfriendly (to women) electoral systems, gender-stereotypical structures and conceptions, unequal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life. Furthermore, growing religious fundamentalism is worsening women's participation in political processes in rural areas. These challenges to rural women contribute to lack of space for women's groups in local public decision-making. Therefore, rural women's and girls' rights, gender equality in rural areas are poorly addressed in local development strategies, plans, and budgets. There is lack of the target-oriented state programs on rural women's political advancement to power bodies and lack of state financing of the activities on gender equality and increasing women's empowerment at rural decision-making. In theory rural sustainable development policies, work plans and agenda should be informed and impacted by local women, rural governance much have an accountability going to these women – rural local women. The commitments from 26 years ago have not been realized for rural women's empowerment in many countries; and, rural women's political rights are far from satisfactory. One of the UNECE sub-regions, Central Asia, is officially recognized as one of the worst in women's rights and gender equality status. For example, in Kyrgyzstan there is only 11 per cent of women in rural elected bodies, less than five per cent of women are heads of rural administrations. Such a situation leads to a lack of women's agenda in local rural sustainable development plans.

For rural development strategies and plans to be effective, they must include, as one of priority areas, women's rights and gender equality components so that national and international commitments on women's rights and gender equality became an integral part of local strategies and plans. In practice it is not a reality. Political economic development strategies and plans of rural settings in many countries lack local rural women's needs, SDG # 5 is not integrated in many local plans. It is important to set up accountability mechanisms at local levels on implementation of these plans and on what means of implementation are required to realize women's and gender equality needs in rural areas, on public allocations for women's rights and gender equality. Under-investment into women's rights and gender equality needs in local agendas is owing to the low level of women's participation in political processes. Changing negative social norms and gender stereotypes should be part of the local agenda. Patriarchy limits rural women chances to run and win elections and contribute to discriminatory attitudes and practices, socialization and negative stereotyping of women and men. This also impacts on women's participation in political processes. Lack of women's impact on planning, implementation and monitoring led, for example, to low level of support to rural women's business development. There is a need for practical measures to support policies for rural women's equal economic rights, rural women's economic empowerment. Because of

a high need in building, supporting and advancing women's small and medium business in villages development partners should support women's entrepreneurship. Such socio-political environment is accompanied by low level of support and opportunities to local, rural women's organizations. Women's rights organizations struggle for changes in local governance attitude towards inclusion of women's rights and gender equality agenda into mainstream local decision-making processes.

To address such challenges and improve rural women's life, to strengthen local women's ownership there are local women's organizations. Rural women's groups do big work, role of women's groups to implementation of the commitments is significant. But many local rural women's groups face problems. Many challenges and gaps are in the area of enabling environment for rural women's empowerment. One of the continuing challenges is weak level of financing of rural women's organizations in many developing countries. Strengthening rural women's rights organizations is one the fundamental approaches in rural women's empowerment. Women's organizations in rural areas needs more space in decision-making, more resources for their operations, capacity and advocacy.

Civil society organizations, women's groups are a vibrant and essential feature in the democratic life of countries across the globe. In struggling for rural women's rights and for increasing local women's ownership of development, rural women's rights organizations play a crucial role. The majority of achievements are achieved due to the work of women's local groups. It is their role to demand for local level accountability for implementation of national and international commitments. Women's rights organizations increase the development effectiveness – a this process that must be supported and recognized at all levels. It is important to strengthen local women's ownership and women's political, economic and social empowerment in rural areas. But there are numerous challenges in front of local women's groups. Structural barriers for women's empowerment in rural areas continue to limit women's rights. Often they are not equal participants in decision-making, their voice is not heard, in many countries rural women's groups are severely under resourced.

Support to local women's groups is important not only because of the importance of their advocacy but also because they improve the whole development process. If adequately supported, rural women's rights organizations increase development effectiveness of decision-making and implementation of development plans. Women's organizations as development actors are committed to realizing positive sustainable change, they pursue equitable partnerships and solidarity with the knowledge and wisdom of local and indigenous communities, strengthening innovation and their vision for the future they would like to see. Women's groups practice transparency and accountability and they are among those who promote environmental sustainability. It is women's groups who strengthen people's empowerment, democratic ownership and participation. Women's groups Respect and promote human rights and social justice.

Conclusion

Civil society organizations and women's organizations must have good opportunities and enabling environment in order to bring diverse women's voices, especially of local rural women to decision making arenas; transform State and other parties' attitude towards marginalized and poor women. However, in their efforts to promote democratic ownership and participation, women's organizations, and in particular grass roots organizations, face numerous challenges including lack of capacity, funding and networking capabilities.

Recommendations to State, Donors, Private Sector and CSOs

We call for increased investment to rural women's groups to support their work.

Set up funds for support of local women's rights organizations.

Set up gender quotas for all local and rural decision-making bodies to ensure that women's needs and rights, feminist principles were reflected in development plans.

Institutionalization mechanisms are needed to ensure that women's groups participate in all rural SDG processes.

Increase of rural participation in local decision-making bodies and processes through investments to capacity increase, skills development, integration of women's rights and gender equality into local agenda, strategies, plans and budgets.

Set up effective accountability mechanisms for implementation of plans for women's rights at local level.

Gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at local level.

After Covid-19 recovery to ensure women's full and equal participation and leadership in the economy, especially in rural areas.

Integration of the SDG women's rights and gender equality into rural strategies and Programs.

Ensure financing to these strategies and plans.
