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## Commission on the Status of Women

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”: implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review theme: challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls**

## Review of the implementation of the agreed conclusions of the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report provides a review of the implementation by Member States of the agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women at its sixty-second session, held in 2018, on the challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls. The review was conducted at a complex moment for realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in rural areas. Less than a decade remains before the end of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the world is in the throes of the combined repercussions of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, cost-of-living, food and fuel crises, and environmental and climate emergencies. These cascading crises have disproportionate impacts on rural women and girls, including their increased vulnerability to extreme poverty. Gender gaps and inequalities continue to deepen in rural areas, and rural women and girls lag behind across Sustainable Development Goal indicators. Renewed and targeted development efforts, reaffirmation of rights and robust investment and action are needed to transform the livelihoods, well-being and resilience of rural women and girls.



## I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [2022/4](#) on the future organization and methods of work of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Economic and Social Council decided that, at each session, the Commission would evaluate progress made in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on a priority theme of a previous session, as its review theme. It requested the Secretary General to submit to the Commission a report on progress made on the review theme at the national level. In accordance with Council resolution [2020/15](#) on the Commission's multi-year programme of work, the review theme of the Commission at its sixty-seventh session, in 2023, will be "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls", in accordance with the agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission at its sixty-second session, held in 2018.

2. The present report serves to assess the implementation by Member States of the agreed conclusions on the theme "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls" over the past five years, including their actions in the following broad areas: strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks; implementing economic and social policies for the empowerment of rural women and girls; and strengthening the collective voice, leadership and decision-making of all rural women and girls. The impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the environment and climate emergencies and the cost-of-living, food and fuel crises on rural women and girls are also addressed.

3. The report is informed by the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on the twenty-fifth anniversary of its adoption (see [E/CN.6/2020/3](#)) and by information received from Member States and one non-member State<sup>1</sup> and other sources, including the reports of the Secretary-General on progress made towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

4. The present report will be accompanied by presentations given by Member States on a voluntary basis at the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on lessons learned, challenges and best practices.

## II. Context for the implementation of the agreed conclusions

5. The agreed conclusions adopted by the Commission at its sixty-second session (see [E/2018/27](#)) reflect a strong consensus on the ways and means of achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls. They contain concrete normative, policy and programmatic measures to overcome persistent multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, inequalities, including gender inequality, and structural barriers faced by women and girls living in rural areas and to ensure the realization of their rights, well-being and resilience.

6. Normative conventions, resolutions and instruments support the agreed conclusions and their implementation. In the overarching framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Member States called for transforming rural

<sup>1</sup> Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Australia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Benin, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Canada, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, El Salvador, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Iceland, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Malawi, Mauritius, Mexico, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Panama, Peru, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye, Ukraine and State of Palestine.

development to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls. They urged investment in rural areas in developing countries through sustainable agriculture and fisheries and support for women farmers, herders and fishers. The gender-responsive implementation of all Sustainable Development Goals in an interlinked manner is essential, but is notably so for Goal 1, to end poverty in all its forms everywhere; Goal 2, to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition; Goal 5, to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; Goal 13, to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; and Goal 15, to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems.

7. Nevertheless, attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 appears increasingly unlikely, making the ambition expressed in the report of the Secretary-General entitled “Our Common Agenda” ever more urgent.<sup>2</sup> According to available data, the world is not on track to achieve Goal 5 by 2030; in addition, less than half the data needed to monitor progress is available. Of the 18 Goal 5 indicators (and subindicators), only 2 – on seats held by women in local governments and laws on equal access to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education – are close to target globally, while 3 others critical for gender equality – time spent on unpaid care and domestic work, decision-making on sexual and reproductive health and gender-responsive budgeting – are far or very far from target.<sup>3</sup>

8. In his report on the 25-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (E/CN.6/2020/3), the Secretary-General emphasized the importance of addressing, through improved access to productive resources, decent work, social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure, the challenges that rural women face: disproportionate levels of poverty, illiteracy and unpaid care and domestic workloads; vulnerability to environmental degradation and climate change; and the need to support their livelihoods, resilience and well-being.

9. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, specifically in article 14, calls on States parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against rural women. General recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women recognizes that rural women in both developing and developed countries are deeply affected by economic and political exclusion, poverty, climate change and disasters, and lack of access to infrastructure, services and social protection. The recommendation underscores that rural development policies continue to overlook the priorities and rights of women, including those of women farmers and migrant women workers employed in agriculture.

10. General recommendation No. 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change notes that rural and Indigenous women are directly affected by the impacts of climate change and disasters as food producers and agricultural workers. Their climate resilience is compromised by insecure land tenure, poor quality plots, and the outmigration of men that leaves them to shoulder farming responsibilities on their own. Climate-related resource scarcity also increases their risk of exposure to violence.

11. General recommendation No. 39 (2022) on the rights of Indigenous women and girls calls on States parties to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against Indigenous women and girls living in rural, remote and urban areas, to ensure

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.22.I.2).

<sup>3</sup> Ginette Azcona and others, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2022* (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2022).

access to justice and effective remedies and to enable the realization of their rights to effective participation in political and public life; education; work; health; culture; land, territories and natural resources; food, water and seeds; and a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

12. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas) recognizes that peasants and other people living in rural areas have the right to land, individually and/or collectively, including the right to access, sustainably use and manage land, water bodies, coastal seas, fisheries, pastures and forests; to achieve an adequate standard of living; to cultural development; and to have a place to live in security, peace and dignity. It further recognizes that peasant women and other women working in rural areas should enjoy without discrimination the right to equal access to, use of and management of land and natural resources, and to equal or priority treatment in land and agrarian reform and in land resettlement schemes.

13. In its resolution 76/300 on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, the General Assembly recognized both the threat that biodiversity loss, climate change, desertification, environmental degradation and unsustainable development pose to the enjoyment of human rights by present and future generations, especially women and girls, and the importance of gender-responsive action, and the leadership, decision-making and participation of women and girls in safeguarding the environment.

14. Global poverty rose in 2020 for the first time in over two decades, with 90 million people falling into extreme poverty in the wake of the pandemic.<sup>4</sup> In 2021, poverty induced by the pandemic deepened as waves of virus resurgence, lack of global vaccination, soaring debt levels, rising food prices, massive losses of jobs and livelihoods, especially among women in the informal economy, and weakened social protection systems left the poorest unprotected. Inequalities between and within countries increased as rates of recovery between rich and poor countries diverged, with worsening poverty among the poorest people.<sup>5</sup> In 2022, the lingering impacts of the pandemic and sluggish recovery in many countries have been intensified by rising inflation and the effects of the war in Ukraine, which could lead to an additional 75 million to 95 million people falling into extreme poverty. The ability of Governments in developing countries to mitigate these combined and intensifying impacts by applying social protection measures has been limited by shrinking fiscal space due to the exigencies of the COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery and the cost-of-living, food and fuel crises.<sup>6</sup>

15. Projections indicate that by the end of 2022, some 383 million women and girls will live in extreme poverty compared with 368 million men and boys. Nearly 63 per cent of those women and girls live in sub-Saharan Africa and over 21 per cent live in Central Asia and Southern Asia. Unless the global community takes decisive action, by 2030 more women and girls will live in extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa than do in 2022.<sup>7</sup>

16. As of 2021, 43 per cent of the world's population,<sup>8</sup> or more than 3 billion people, live in rural areas. Eighty per cent of the world's extreme poor are also located in

<sup>4</sup> Nishant Yonzan, Daniel Gerszon Mahler and Christop Lakner, "Global poverty in the 2020s is on a new, worse course", World Bank Blogs, 14 October 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Carolina Sánchez-Páramo and others, "COVID-19 leaves a legacy of rising poverty and widening inequality", World Bank Blogs, 7 October 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Gerszon Mahler and others, "Pandemic, prices, and poverty", World Bank Blogs, 13 April 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Azcona and others, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals* (see footnote 3).

<sup>8</sup> World Bank, Rural population (% of total population). Available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS>.

rural areas. An estimated 2.5 billion people rely on agricultural livelihoods.<sup>9</sup> Approximately 1.5 billion people, often poor, live in smallholder households with heightened vulnerability to the effects of economic, environmental and climate shocks<sup>10</sup> and the disruptions in supply chains and unprecedented price rises for food, fuel and fertilizer brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine; these effects have had disproportionate gendered impacts, pushing rural women and girls further behind.<sup>11</sup>

17. However, long before the COVID-19 and Ukraine crises, rural women and girls were at greater risk of rising poverty, food insecurity, violence and exclusion in the context of the escalating consequences of the environment and climate emergencies, the lingering impacts of the great recession<sup>12</sup> and the deep persistence of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination to which they are subject on the basis of sex, age, income, location, marital status and head of household status, race and/or ethnicity, culture, Indigenous status, sexual orientation and gender identity, and as women affected by HIV/AIDS, women with disabilities, and women who are migrants, refugees or internally displaced.<sup>13</sup> Almost every global gender and development indicator with available data showed that rural women lag behind rural men and urban women.<sup>14</sup>

18. These entrenched gender inequalities, structural barriers and discriminatory social norms and practices continue to place rural women and girls at a severe disadvantage. Longstanding problems of violence, harmful practices and child marriage, food insecurity and malnutrition, excessive unpaid care and domestic work and agricultural labour demands, among others, have been exacerbated in the cascading climate, conflict and cost-of-living crises.<sup>15</sup> However, rural women and girls are much less likely to receive the support they need due to the lack of social protection, essential services and access to justice in rural and remote areas.<sup>16</sup> Disparities in social protection adequacy and quality are striking between rural and urban areas with rural women and girls the least covered.<sup>17</sup> The intensification of the

<sup>9</sup> International Food Policy Research Institute, *2019 Global Food Policy Report* (Washington, D.C., 2019).

<sup>10</sup> International Food Policy Research Institute, *Global Food Policy Report 2020: Building Inclusive Food Systems* (Washington, D.C., 2020); Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP) and World Health Organization (WHO), *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022: Repurposing Food and Agricultural Policies to Make Healthy Diets More Affordable*, The State of the World Series, FAO (Rome, 2022).

<sup>11</sup> UN-Women, "Global gendered impacts of the Ukraine crisis on energy access and food security and nutrition", policy paper, 2022; Jade Cochran and others, "Addressing the economic fallout of COVID-19: pathways and policy options for a gender-responsive recovery", Policy Brief No. 15, 2020; Celine Salcedo-La Viña, Ruchika Singh and Natalie Elwell, "Rural women must be at the heart of COVID-19 response and recovery", commentary, World Resources Institute, 21 September 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Isabel Ortiz and Matthew Cummins, "The austerity decade 2010–20", *Social Policy and Society*, vol. 20, no. 1, (January 2021), pp. 142–157.

<sup>13</sup> UN-Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2015–2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights* (New York, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> FAO, *State of Food and Agriculture: Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security* (Rome, 2016), p. 49.

<sup>15</sup> UN-Women, *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development 2019: Why Addressing Women's Income and Time Poverty Matters for Sustainable Development* (2020); UN-Women, "Global gendered impacts of the Ukraine crisis" (see footnote 11); United Nations, *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022* (see footnote 2).

<sup>16</sup> UN-Women, "COVID-19 and violence against women and girls: addressing the shadow pandemic", Policy Brief No 17, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), *World Social Protection Report 2020–22: Social Protection at the Crossroads – In Pursuit of a Better Future* (Geneva, 2021).

paid and unpaid care work of women to cope with crises – care for children, the sick, the elderly – has been particularly acute in rural areas due to limited access to social, care and health services and to clean, safe and affordable water, sanitation and energy.<sup>18</sup>

19. While some progress was made between 2015 and 2020 in the use of safely managed drinking water, which rose from 70 to 74 per cent of the global population, 2 billion people still lacked this service when the pandemic struck. This includes 1.2 billion people without even basic drinking water service, 80 per cent of whom live in rural areas and half in least developed countries.<sup>19</sup> Soaring costs of oil and gas due to the war in Ukraine have had deleterious effects on the energy poverty of women and girls and their already unequal access to energy for women and girls. The economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic caused many in developing countries who had only recently gained energy access to lose it, among them 15 million sub-Saharan Africans. The pandemic also meant that many people could not pay for modern fuels, including those for clean cooking.<sup>20</sup> As such, the unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities of rural women and girls during the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change-induced droughts have become insurmountable burdens.

20. An estimated 345 million people throughout 82 countries are facing or are at high risk of facing acute food insecurity in 2022, an increase of almost 200 million people from pre-pandemic levels. Fifty million people are facing emergency or worse levels of acute food insecurity across 45 countries due to the spiralling costs of food, fuel and fertilizer in the wake of the war in Ukraine and accelerating climate change.<sup>21</sup> Critically, the widening gender gap in food insecurity, which grew from 1.7 per cent in 2019 to more than 4 per cent in 2021 – with 31.9 per cent of women moderately or severely food insecure compared with 27.6 per cent of men – means that globally and across regions, women are more food insecure than men.<sup>22</sup> In 2022, the number of women assisted by the World Food Programme due to food insecurity has nearly doubled.<sup>23</sup>

21. Although their work is crucial to support food security and nutrition and combat hunger, smallholder farmers and food producers in rural areas are in situations of persistent vulnerability, made greater in times of crisis and rising prices. Smallholder farmer incomes are precarious, and those of women smallholder farmers are especially so. In half of 42 countries with available data, while the productivity levels of women and men food producers are similar, the average annual income of food production units headed by women is 50 per cent to 70 per cent less than of those headed by men,<sup>24</sup> which may be a consequence of the advantageous access men generally have to higher-value crops, assets and markets.<sup>25</sup>

22. Discriminatory laws, policies and social norms persist in impeding the full and equal participation of rural women in their economy and society, notably significant gender inequalities in access to, use of and control over land and other productive resources. Although data gaps preclude generalized statements, the pattern that

<sup>18</sup> UN-Women, “COVID-19 and the care economy: immediate action and structural transformation for a gender-responsive recovery”, Policy Brief No. 16, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022* (see footnote 2).

<sup>20</sup> UN-Women, “Global gendered impacts of the Ukraine crisis” (see footnote 11).

<sup>21</sup> World Food Programme, “WFP global operational response plan 2022”, Update #5, June 2022.

<sup>22</sup> FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022* (see footnote 10).

<sup>23</sup> United Nations Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance, “Global impact of war in Ukraine: energy crisis”, Brief No. 3, August 2022.

<sup>24</sup> United Nations, *Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022* (see footnote 2).

<sup>25</sup> Agnes R. Quisumbing and Cheryl R. Doss, “Chapter 82 – Gender in agriculture and food systems,” in *Handbook of Agricultural Economics*, vol. 5, 2021, pp. 4481–4549.

emerges across countries shows that women consistently own less land than men, regardless of how ownership is conceptualized, and in many cases the gender gaps are quite large. Legal and policy frameworks governing rights and access to land, property and inheritance are fundamental underpinnings for the livelihoods, well-being and resilience of rural women but have been slow to change.<sup>26</sup> Globally, a quarter of employed women work in agriculture, including forestry and fishing,<sup>27</sup> with agriculture remaining the most important employment sector for women in low-income and lower-middle-income countries. Nonetheless, less than 15 per cent of agricultural landholders globally are women, although this varies widely among regions.<sup>28</sup> More recent analysis indicates that in 30 of 36 countries with available data, less than 50 per cent of women own or have secure tenure over agricultural land; in 20 of these countries less than 30 per cent of women do. In 28 of the 36 countries, more men than women own or have rights to agricultural land.<sup>29</sup>

23. Women have only three quarters of the legal rights of men across 190 countries. The property rights of women are restricted in 76 economies, and the rates of property ownership for women are significantly behind those of men in 41 low- and middle-income economies, with greater differences in rural and high-poverty areas. Surviving women and men spouses do not have equal inheritance rights in 43 economies, which means that widows are often dispossessed of property and left destitute upon the death of a spouse. Furthermore, daughters do not have the same inheritance rights as sons in 42 economies.<sup>30</sup>

24. An analysis of information from 180 countries found that 164 countries explicitly recognize the rights of women to own, use, and make decisions about land on equal terms with men. However, only 52 countries guarantee these rights in law and practice, which means that women and men have equal rights to own, use and control land in only 29 per cent of the countries studied. Women are restricted in claiming and protecting land assets because of customary, religious or traditional laws and practices in 62 per cent of countries, and in the remaining 9 per cent of countries, women do not have the same legal rights as men to own, use or control land.<sup>31</sup>

25. Great strides have been made globally in the past two decades towards gender parity in education, which was close to being achieved before the unforeseen impacts of the pandemic resulted in 1.6 million learners leaving school and an estimated 11 million girls at risk of not returning, in addition to the 130 million girls who were already out of school. Gender gaps remain problematic in some regions (e.g. sub-Saharan Africa) and progress has been reversed in some countries (e.g. Afghanistan).<sup>32</sup> Girls from the poorest households and in rural areas have been left behind. The difference in upper secondary school completion rates between the poorest rural girls and the richest urban girls ranges from 11.5 to 72.2 per cent in 29 countries with recent data. The chances of rural girls completing primary and secondary education are jeopardized not only by poverty but also by additional

<sup>26</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UN-Women, *Realizing Women's Rights to Land and Other Productive Resources*, 2nd ed. (New York and Geneva, 2020).

<sup>27</sup> World Bank, *Employment in agriculture, female (% of female employment)*. Available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.FE.ZS>.

<sup>28</sup> FAO, "The gender gap in land rights", policy brief, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> FAO, *Tracking Progress on Food and Agriculture-related SDG Indicators 2022* (Rome, 2022).

<sup>30</sup> World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law 2022* (Washington, D.C., 2022).

<sup>31</sup> Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *SIGI 2019 Global Report: Transforming Challenges into Opportunities*, OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index Series (Paris, 2019); E/2022/55.

<sup>32</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Gender Report: Deepening the Debate on Those Still Left Behind*, Global Education Monitoring Report 2022 (Paris, 2022); UNESCO, *When Schools Shut: Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 School Closures* (Paris, 2021).

burdens such as the need to spend precious time on unpaid care and domestic work and the lack of improved drinking water or electricity in their households.<sup>33</sup>

26. The gender digital divide in rural areas has restricted the access of rural women and girls to distance education, digital financial services, agricultural extension services and life-saving information during crises.<sup>34</sup> The evidence is inconclusive about any progress made in their digital inclusion. As of 2021, the gender gap in bank account ownership dropped to 6 per cent after stagnating at 9 per cent from 2011, an improvement which may be due to the increased adoption of digital financial services during the COVID-19 pandemic, even though among account holders in developing countries, men are 6 per cent more likely on average to use digital payments than women. Account ownership tends to be lower in rural than in urban areas in developing countries, and most unbanked adults in rural areas are women.<sup>35</sup>

27. The gender gap in ownership of mobile phones that enable rural women to access, for example, online banking, extension services and information on climate-resilient farming practices and solutions, is 13 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa and 19 per cent in South Asia. For mobile Internet use, the gender gaps are highest at 37 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa and 41 per cent in South Asia. These gender gaps in mobile phone ownership and mobile Internet use appear to be greatest in rural areas and among those with low literacy levels, those with low incomes, people aged over 55 and people with disabilities, indicating the enduring force of gender discrimination and inequitable social norms and the need to overcome them.<sup>36</sup>

28. In this challenging context, the agreed conclusions of the sixty-second session of the Commission and their recommended actions for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls are timely and urgent.

### III. National implementation efforts

29. Member States have made concerted efforts to implement the agreed conclusions since their adoption in 2018, considering the exigencies of the COVID-19 and climate crises in many cases, based on the 52 submissions received. They have provided examples of good practices and proven, innovative means to realize gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls. The full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and national strategies and frameworks relevant to women and girls in rural areas are critical in this regard.

#### A. Strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks

30. The agreed conclusions emphasize the need to strengthen normative, legal and policy frameworks to fully implement existing commitments for the achievement of gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls and the full and equal enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The agreed conclusions call for such frameworks to promote and protect the enjoyment of human rights by rural women and girls, eliminate the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination

<sup>33</sup> Azcona and others, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals* (see footnote 3).

<sup>34</sup> GSMA, *Connected Women: the Mobile Gender Gap Report 2020* (London, 2020).

<sup>35</sup> Asli Demirgüç-Kunt and others, *The Global Findex Database 2021: Financial Inclusion, Digital Payments, and Resilience in the Age of COVID-19* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2022).

<sup>36</sup> GSMA, *Connected Women: the Mobile Gender Gap Report 2021* (London, 2021); GSMA, *Connected Women: the Mobile Gender Gap Report 2022* (London, 2022).



and violence against them and ensure their equal rights and access to natural, economic and productive resources.

31. The majority of reporting Member States have made significant progress in advancing gender equality and eliminating gender-based discrimination through the promulgation or strengthening of national laws and policy frameworks that cover rural areas (Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Canada, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Georgia, Greece, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Iceland, Japan, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mauritius, Mexico, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Panama, Peru, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye).

32. Several Member States have specifically focused on rural women and girls within these broad frameworks. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the third Gender Action Plan (2018–2022) and its accompanying financial mechanism make provisions for the promotion of gender equality in rural areas and the economic and social empowerment of rural women by ensuring adequate health, living conditions and social protection and by preventing and addressing gender-based violence with the provision of services for victims and survivors. The National Programme for Equality between Women and Men (2020–2024) of Mexico is anchored in the right to a healthy environment, well-being and development with specific strategies and actions regarding the rights of rural women and girls. The National Gender Equality Policy (2019) of Peru recognizes that the structural discrimination against women in all their diversity, including rural, Indigenous, mestizo and women of African descent, is a public problem that must be addressed.

33. Consideration has also been given to gender-diverse rural people in national frameworks. The Sowing Equality programme of Argentina, integrated in the Equality in Diversity Plan (2021–2023), is intended to transform the structural factors that sustain and reproduce gender inequalities in rural areas and guarantee the full development of women and LGBTI+ persons in rural contexts from an intersectional, intercultural and human rights perspective. In Colombia, the agricultural, fisheries and rural development sector adopted the public policy framework created by Decree 762 (2018) to guarantee the effective exercise of the rights of LGBTI persons and persons of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity; a sectoral plan of action for the period from 2020 to 2022 was consolidated and is being monitored.

34. In terms of normative and policy frameworks specific to rural women and girls, in Austria, Article 134 of the Agricultural Labour Act (2021) prohibits gender discrimination in career advancement and promotions; in cases of discrimination against women, the employer is obliged to make financial compensation for professional and personal damages. Slovenia participated in an international ministerial conference on women and their position in rural areas (2021) that adopted a declaration on the importance of equal rights and development for women in European rural areas. In Sweden, the Rural Development Programme (2014–2020) emphasized that men and women within the farming sector have equal rights, conditions and possibilities to live and work in rural areas.

35. Discriminatory laws, policies and practices have marginalized rural women and girls with respect to rights and access to natural, economic and productive resources. Member States have taken steps to redress such gender discrimination, particularly in terms of the property, inheritance and land rights and tenure security of women. In Côte d'Ivoire, Laws 2019-570 and 2019-573 strengthened the inheritance rights of women and girls. In support of the land rights and tenure security of rural and Indigenous women, Guatemala issued an operations manual for the Policy to Facilitate Peasant, Maya, Xinka, Garifuna and Mestiza Women to Facilitate Access

to Land and Other Productive Assets (2018). The Rural Land Policy (2021) of the Niger is aimed at providing equal access and tenure security for women, young people, migrants and people with disabilities. In Mexico, the Women for Access to Land project has led to the recognition of the agrarian rights and titles of nearly 4,000 rural and Indigenous women. In Spain, the Government has registered over 1,000 joint agricultural land titles accompanied by subsidies to support the participation and leadership of rural women as of September 2022. The national policy for Beneficiary Selection and Land Allocation (2020) of South Africa targets gender inequality in land ownership by aiming for the allocation of 50 per cent of agricultural land to be redistributed to women smallholder farmers, 40 per cent to youth and 10 per cent to people with disabilities.

36. With regard to economic and productive resources, in Lebanon, the National Agriculture Strategy (2020–2025) provides technical assistance to rural women to access loans and financing. In Mexico, the National Financial Development Agency for Agriculture, Rural Development, Forestry and Fisheries facilitated loans for 218,069 women in 2021 and an additional 59,854 women as of July 2022.

37. International development cooperation has significant influence on promoting the rights and access to resources for rural women. For Germany, gender equality is a key objective in 80 per cent of projects funded through official development assistance for agriculture and rural development. The support of Germany for the International Land Coalition, Rights and Resources Initiative and the Generation Equality Forum Action Coalition on Economic Justice and Rights has contributed to scaling up efforts to secure land and resource rights for rural women in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and its Global Programme Responsible Land Policy has supported the participation of women in decision-making and awareness-raising on land issues. Over the reporting period, the Austrian Development Cooperation committed over 61 million euros to initiatives promoting and protecting the rights of rural women and girls to resources, participation and leadership, sexual and reproductive health and physical and psychological well-being.

38. Laws and policies have been enacted, strengthened and enforced in order to eliminate domestic violence, sexual violence and harassment, and gender-based violence against women and girls, and to provide appropriate remedies and means of redress (Albania, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Benin, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Botswana, Canada, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Israel, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Mauritius, Mexico, Myanmar, Peru, South Africa, Türkiye, State of Palestine). In South Africa, the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) of the International Labour Organization was ratified in 2022, the country joining 22 other Member States in that regard.

39. Virtually all these laws, policies and initiatives are national in scope and would, as such, cover women and girls in rural areas; however, in their submissions Member States did not for the most part specifically address gender-based violence against women and girls and gender-diverse persons in rural areas. This is of particular concern since evidence suggests that women and girls in rural areas may be at greater risk of all forms of violence, including child, early and forced marriage and other harmful practices. Data are scarce but alarming. In Canada, for example, the rates of intimate partner violence experienced by rural women, as reported by the police, are 75 per cent higher than for urban women, seven times higher than for urban men and

3.5 times higher than for rural men; violent crime rates for rural women, as reported by the police, are 56 per cent higher than the national rate.<sup>37</sup>

40. The submission of Canada notes the development of its National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, which is expected to recognize that Indigenous women, Black and racialized women, non-binary, gender-diverse, LGBTQ and Two-Spirit people, those living in northern, rural, and remote communities, those with disabilities, non-status and temporary status migrants, immigrants and refugees, children and youth, and seniors experience high rates of gender-based violence and that the intersection of two or more of these characteristics compounds the risk of experiencing such violence.<sup>38</sup>

41. Rural and Indigenous women and gender-diverse persons who are human rights defenders are under acute threat of violence. Globally, land, environment and Indigenous human rights defenders suffer the most violations (14.5 per cent of the total reported in 2021, followed by those defending freedom of expression, human rights movements, and the rights of women and LGBTQI+ persons) and killings (nearly 60 per cent of 358 human rights defenders reported killed in 2021).<sup>39</sup>

## **B. Implementing economic and social policies for the empowerment of all rural women and girls**

42. The agreed conclusions call for implementing and investing in economic and social policies that integrate a gender perspective into national agricultural and rural development; ensure the rights and access of rural women and girls to food, education, healthcare, decent work and entrepreneurship; recognize, reduce and redistribute their unpaid care and domestic workloads; and improve sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics to undergird policies and actions supportive of rural women and girls in all their diversity.

43. Member States emphasize gender-responsive budgeting to implement economic and social policies (Argentina, Australia, Colombia, Nepal, Peru) and creating and strengthening gender-responsive financing mechanisms, including access to public funds and business and cooperative opportunities for rural women and girls (Albania), a women's bank (Plurinational State of Bolivia), the financial inclusion of women through village savings and loan associations and microprojects targeting 1.5 million women (Egypt), financial education for women leaders and LGBTQI+ persons (El Salvador), public and private investments in rural areas to attract and retain women residents (Greece), credits and subsidies to peasant and Indigenous families with no or insufficient land to rent or buy land, mostly benefiting women-headed households (Guatemala), rural savings banks with women on the boards of directors, to facilitate credits for women (Honduras), microcredits for rural and nomadic women and support for their cooperatives (Islamic Republic of Iran), credits for agro-based enterprises owned by women (Panama), a fund with a gender lens and financial education for rural and Indigenous women (Peru), microfinancing for women (Saudi Arabia), support for women farmers to access credit (Serbia), radio talk shows in 11 official national languages to promote participation of women-owned businesses in public procurement (South Africa), support for women's cooperatives (Jordan, Türkiye) and grants for women farmers, including internally displaced persons, and

<sup>37</sup> Robert Nonomura and Linda Baker, "Gender-based violence in rural, remote and northern communities", *Learning Network*, No. 35, London, Ontario, Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children, 2021.

<sup>38</sup> Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers responsible for the Status of Women, "Joint declaration for a Canada free of gender-based violence", 22 January 2021.

<sup>39</sup> Front Line Defenders, *Global Analysis 2021* (Dublin and Brussels, 2022).

for start-ups and existing businesses related to horticulture, berry cultivation and viticulture (Ukraine).

44. Member States support decent work and entrepreneurship opportunities for women and girls, including training, networking and initial funds (Albania, Argentina, Australia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Canada, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Georgia, Germany, Guyana, Israel, Jordan, Republic of Korea, Lebanon, Malawi, Mexico, Myanmar, Panama, Peru, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, South Africa, Spain).

45. In Australia, the Future Female Entrepreneurs Program is open to all young women aged from 10 to 24, and the Boosting Female Founders Initiative supports access to early-stage capital and expert mentoring for women entrepreneurs to enter domestic and global markets. The Government of Canada committed 19.9 million Canadian dollars (2018–2023) for Apprenticeship Incentive Grants for Women and an additional 1 billion Canadian dollars to the Universal Broadband Fund to connect 98 per cent of Canadians to high-speed Internet by 2026 and all Canadians by 2030, allowing women and girls living in rural, remote and northern communities to access online information, resources and support for their businesses. In Georgia, the Government is promoting the use of Internet and digital services by women entrepreneurs. A total of 30 million soles has been budgeted in Peru for the country's Rural and Indigenous Women's Entrepreneurship Strategy (2022) to finance agriculture, livestock and forestry enterprises. In South Africa, the online SheTradesZA platform seeks to register 10,000 women-owned and managed enterprises annually as part of gender mainstreaming into the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area. As part of its international development cooperation, the Government of Germany, has contributed 75 million euros since 2017 to the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative.

46. Countries also focus on improving farming and natural resource management by women and increasing climate resilience. In Argentina, an integrated plan for women in family, peasant and indigenous agriculture, In Our Hands, was launched to add value to production and marketing by rural women. In El Salvador, efforts are being made to implement increasing climate resilience measures in the agroecosystems of its dry corridor project, working with women and men family farmers. In Malawi, the Climate Smart Enhanced Public Works Programme is aimed at achieving 50 per cent participation of women in climate-resilient land, water and natural resource management and environmental conservation. In Spain, a subsidy is provided to the National Association of Women in Fisheries to support and make visible women in the fishing sector and increase awareness about their role and contribution.

47. Addressing food security and nutrition is a concern for several Member States, although responses are incommensurate with the striking increase in gendered food insecurity. In South Africa, the National School Nutrition Programme reaches nine million learners in nearly 20,000 of the poorest schools in a long-time effort to combat malnutrition, reduce hunger and improve school attendance. Benin is also implementing its National Integrated School Lunch Program, currently operational in over 5,000 schools. Involving women farmers and producers in improving family agriculture and home gardens, often with native seeds and local crops, and enhancing diets, food security and nutrition are approaches pursued in Argentina, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, El Salvador, Guatemala, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Nepal, the Niger, Panama and the State of Palestine. In Argentina, the Food Benefit reaches 2.4 million people, of which 94 per cent are women, and is designed to guarantee a basic food basket to support nutrition and local production and distribution of food crops. In addition, the national plan against hunger supports food security and sovereignty and provides

subsidies to temporary and seasonal rural workers, women and men, who work in informal and precarious conditions.

48. Relatively few Member State considered care work in their submissions. The Governments of Argentina and Mexico are developing national care systems, the Government of Colombia is developing a public policy on care and the Government of Canada is planning a national early learning and childcare system with facilities and infrastructure across the country. Similar early childhood care and education initiatives are under way across remote communities in Botswana and throughout South Africa. In Australia, the Community Child Care Fund supports some 900 services to reduce barriers to accessing early childhood education and care, particularly for children and families in disadvantaged, Indigenous, rural and remote communities. In Spain, one of the Strategic Projects for Economic Recovery and Transformation (2022) seeks to transform the care economy, generate quality, stable employment and inclusive, equitable and sustainable development that promotes gender equality and combats rural depopulation.

49. Member States reported on a variety of measures taken for the education of women and girls in minority ethnic, Indigenous and remote and rural communities, for example, the National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptians in the Republic of Albania (2021–2025); the Modernizing Vocational Education and Training in Agriculture in Armenia project for women and men farmers; the Regional University Centres in Australia that allow students in rural, regional and remote areas to enrol in online higher education courses while remaining in their community, with women forming 75 per cent of those registered; the Women’s Resource Centres in Azerbaijan that provide training and support to rural women to launch businesses; the Indigenous education service of Mexico that served over 900,000 women from 2020 to 2021; and in Panama, intercultural and bilingual education from a gender perspective and literacy training for rural, Ngäbe, Kuna and Embera women. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the “Bilingual Nests” strategy facilitates intergenerational meetings in which grandmothers, mothers, aunts and community members transmit language and culture to children; nearly 5,000 children belonging to 34 Indigenous and Afro-Bolivian peoples have benefited from this programme.

50. Interventions towards universal health coverage for women and girls in rural areas, including sexual and reproductive health and prevention and treatment of gender-based violence, were reported by several Member States (Albania, Argentina, Australia, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Canada, Côte d’Ivoire, Mexico, South Africa). The Government of Argentina provided information in the Tehuelche, Guaraní, Wichi and Qom languages about the Law on Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy (2021). The submission of Côte d’Ivoire indicates that the Sahel Women’s Empowerment and Demographic Dividend Project is aimed at improving access for women and adolescent girls to quality reproductive, child and maternal health services and increasing the availability of reproductive health workers in rural areas. In Nepal, the Rural Ultrasound Programme aims for timely identification of complicated pregnancies in rural areas, where radiological services are typically unavailable, and to ensure access to comprehensive emergency obstetric and neonatal care centres. The Sanitary Dignity Programme in South Africa provides free sanitary products to women and girls in poor rural and farm schools and supports the economic empowerment of women through the local manufacture of sanitary products.

51. Significant gaps clearly exist in the data and statistics available on rural women and girls across the thematic areas discussed in this report. Member States report some progress despite the disruptions to statistical operations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. National statistical offices (Canada, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mauritius, Peru, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine) have taken steps to improve

gender statistics and data disaggregated by sex and other characteristics that should yield improved information about women and girls in rural areas. Several countries (Armenia, Australia, Colombia, Egypt, El Salvador, South Africa, Ukraine) have undertaken or are preparing time-use surveys which will help to assess the disproportionate share of unpaid domestic and care work performed by rural women and girls, among other issues.

52. In 2022, the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina is undertaking its first agricultural census since 1960; it is expected to provide a wealth of sex-disaggregated data to inform gender-responsive agricultural policies and measures in rural areas. In Sweden, the Board of Agriculture also undertook a survey in 2020 on the challenges and possibilities for gender equality in farming.

53. In 2021, the Government of Mexico conducted a national survey on the dynamics of household relationships, which provides information on the violence experienced by rural women and girls. The Government of Honduras has planned to conduct a specialized national survey on violence against women and girls in 2022. The Government of Peru established the National Observatory of Violence against Women and Family Group Members, which collects and produces data and information, following up on adherence to government public policies and international commitments in this area.

### **C. Strengthening the collective voice, leadership and decision-making of all rural women and girls**

54. The agreed conclusions emphasize the full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of rural women in the public and private sectors and in the decisions, policies and initiatives that shape their livelihoods, well-being and resilience, including the management of natural resources. They call for rural women and girls to exercise their collective voice, agency and leadership and to organize and join unions, cooperatives and business associations.

55. Submissions reflected the efficacy of gender quotas in supporting the participation and leadership of women in public and political life, primarily in parliamentary, national, municipal and local elections that would extend to rural women (Albania, Armenia, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Georgia, Nepal, State of Palestine) and on boards and in senior management in the workplace (Canada). In 2019, the Niger extended the gender quota system to support the representation of women in government and State administration decision-making bodies and land commissions, and in Peru, Law 30982 established gender quotas in peasant community governance. In the Republic of Korea, the Government continuously monitors whether the legally established 40 per cent gender quota is being attained in agricultural policymaking processes.

56. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2,393 women serve as heads of village councils, up from 2,167 women in 2018. During the period from 2018 to 2022, 3,547 women have served as members of village councils, a nearly 50 per cent increase from the previous period when 2,428 women were members. The participation of rural women in village councils helps to identify, address and monitor the challenges they face while increasing their decision-making abilities and demonstrating the benefits of greater involvement.

57. Countries have also supported the organization of community groups by rural women (Botswana), capacity-building for women to assume leadership roles as village chiefs and district and provincial council members participating in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of local development action plans

(Cambodia), participation in the Association of Rural Women of Slovenia and Council for Women in Rural Areas (Slovenia) and the Rural Women Business Network (Ukraine) and leadership and decision-making in agrifood cooperatives (Spain) and wildlife management (Sweden).

58. In Australia, Lead and Succeed grants serve to support projects that are aimed at helping women in regional, rural and remote areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, older women, women with disabilities, LGBTQI+ women, and women from backgrounds that are culturally and linguistically diverse. The projects are aimed at increasing gender equality, extending opportunities for women's economic participation and leadership and creating safer, more respectful workplaces. In Colombia, the Government developed guidelines for strengthening the participation of rural women in national and territorial advocacy and decision-making spaces in the agricultural and rural development sector. In Georgia, the Gender Equality Council, created in 2010, continues to provide technical assistance for the preparation of gender-responsive municipal action plans and services for rural women, and has visited 59 of 64 municipalities with the last five municipalities to be visited in October 2022. In Guyana, workshops were conducted from 2019 to 2020 to promote the participation and leadership of Indigenous and local women at the highest levels of decision-making in the Government, private sector and communities. Seminars have been held in Kyrgyzstan in 2022 for local women leaders on land rights, which has motivated them to become involved in decision-making processes on the management and use of land resources and in public discussions of the draft Land Code.

## IV. Conclusions

59. Member States have proceeded with the implementation of the agreed conclusions of adopted by the Commission at its sixty-second session, despite the complications posed by the cascading crises affecting development efforts globally. However, implementation and results have been uneven across countries and thematic areas. Crucial gender gaps and inequalities remain and, in some cases, have shown alarming increases, such as in the rates of extreme poverty and food insecurity, and intractability, as in the rights of rural women and their access to land and other productive resources and the educational attainment of rural girls. The disparities in the capacities of higher income and developed countries versus struggling low-income and developing countries to secure the fiscal space to make gender-responsive investments in gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls is also of critical concern.

60. In their submissions, Member States demonstrate their commitment to strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks to advance gender equality and eliminate gender-based discrimination and violence against rural women and girls. Countries showed growing incorporation of gender-diverse persons in rural areas in these measures. Member States are supporting the participation and leadership of rural women and girls in policy arenas and in local organizations, cooperatives and governance structures. Member States highlighted gender-responsive financing mechanisms and decent work and entrepreneurship opportunities for rural women as part of comprehensive programmes and initiatives as well as many targeted efforts to bolster the economic empowerment of rural women. Member States reported on an array of measures reflecting intersectional and intercultural approaches to education in rural areas and expanding the coverage of early childhood care and education in some countries.

61. However, most normative, legal and policy frameworks are quite broad and general in purpose and appear not to be specifically directed to support women and girls in rural areas. Those measures that deliberately target and fund rural women and girls and their communities may have more robust results. Most efforts that reveal progress need to be scaled up to have widespread and lasting effects.

62. Based on information submitted by Member States, renewed efforts are needed to enact and implement economic and social policies that are designed and funded to improve the health, education, care work, food security and resilient livelihoods of rural women and girls, especially to withstand the disproportionate consequences of the crises during the reporting period. Systematic attention is required to ensure access for rural women and girls to land and other productive resources, including digital account ownership and quality, affordable healthcare services. Policies and programmes supporting rural girls to complete their education are missing. Few countries reported on care work, and very little mention was made of the services and infrastructure, especially water and energy, needed to reduce and redistribute the unpaid care and domestic work of rural women and girls. As food insecurity grows to dramatic levels globally, resolute and collaborative efforts are required to end hunger and malnutrition. Although Member States recognize the need to mitigate and adapt to climate change, rural development policies and programmes must be transformed to meet the climate challenge and build the resilience of rural women and girls.

63. Another area that merits greater attention is gender statistics. As national statistical offices resume their work in the aftermath of pandemic shutdowns, the production, analysis and use of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics remain incomplete at best. While progress has been reported on time-use surveys, increased attention to policymaking and financial investment is needed to attain adequate levels of both quantitative and qualitative information on rural women and girls to inform policies and action that will bring about tangible improvements.

64. The cascading crises have signalled the continued relevance of, and urgent need for, accelerated implementation of the agreed conclusions. Significantly increased investment and action will be required to recover lost ground, strengthen the rights, resources and resilience of rural women and girls and make decisive progress towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all rural women and girls by 2030.

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