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Parliaments deliver for rural women and girls

A parliamentary event organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women
at the 62nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

13 March 2018, Conference Room 3, UN Headquarters, New York

CONCEPT NOTE AND AGENDA

1. INTRODUCTION

The empowerment of rural women and girls, and the recognition and protection of their rights, is essential to the achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The role of rural women in agriculture, rural development, food and nutrition and poverty reduction has been recognized at several UN Conferences.¹ The Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), in particular Article 14 of the Convention and General recommendation No. 34 on the rights of rural women, also provide a strong basis to promote and protect the rights of rural women and girls.

In 2015, rural women represented more than 40% of all women in the world; and nearly half of the total population living in rural areas.² Rural women and girls make up a large proportion of the agricultural labour force (nearly half in developing countries),³ including as informal workers. They contribute significantly to agricultural production, food security and nutrition, land and natural resource management and building climate resilience.⁴ Rural women are not a homogenous group, however. Many interventions target rural women as a singular, food-producing entity, without considering the diversity of experiences, needs, conditions and aspirations of rural women and girls for whom being born in a rural setting does not and should not inevitably lead to agriculture.

Rural women and girls face systemic barriers to realizing their rights. In many States, laws, national and local policies, budgets and development strategies ignore or insufficiently address the rights and needs of rural women and girls. Rural women and girls lack a voice in leadership and decision-making. On nearly every global gender and development indicator for which data is available, rural women fare worse than rural men and urban women and men, including those related to health and education.⁵ They have less access to justice, infrastructure, services and opportunities than do women and girls in urban settings. They are particularly affected by the impacts of climate change that can exacerbate gender inequalities in rural communities. These challenges amount to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, injustices and violence.

The sustainable development of rural communities is central to the world's economic, social and environmental viability. It is in the interest of every State to prioritize the empowerment of rural women and girls, their self-determination and participation in decision-making.

The participants in this parliamentary event are invited to share good practices developed by their parliaments to address the needs, amplify the voices, and uphold the interests of rural women and girls, including through: constituency outreach and engagement with women and girls in rural communities; gender impact analysis of current laws to assess their impact on rural women; enacting social and

¹ 15 October has been designated the International Day of Rural Women, and CSWs 57 and 62 focused on rural women's empowerment.

² United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Urbanization Prospects*, based on 2015 data.

³ FAO (2014), *The State of Food and Agriculture: Innovation in Family Farming*.

⁴ UN Women (2015), *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights*.

⁵ CEDAW/C/GC/34.

economic policies that are responsive to the needs and experiences of rural women and girls; dismantling barriers to rural women's access to justice including through non-discriminatory legislation and promotion of rural women's legal empowerment and literacy; gender- and rural-responsive budgeting and policies related to education, health and climate. The event will also highlight available parliamentary mechanisms for channeling the needs and concerns of rural communities in a gender-responsive manner, such as specialized parliamentary committees or women's parliamentary caucuses.

2. AGENDA

13 March 2018

10.00 - 10.30 a.m. Welcome remarks

- Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron, IPU President
- Ms. Purna Sen, Director of the Policy Division, UN Women

10.30 a.m. – 1 p.m. Session 1: Amplifying the voices of rural women and girls

Rural women, just as all women, have a right to participate in decision-making and engage with decision-makers at all levels but are globally inadequately represented as elected officials. This session will examine existing and recommended strategies and mechanisms to bring parliaments and rural communities closer, and to connect parliaments in particular with rural women and girls. It will explore what parliaments and their members are doing to garner and address the needs and interests of rural women and girls, and how rural women and girls can better influence policy formulation, implementation and monitoring at all levels and in all areas that affect their lives through their engagement with parliaments. It will also explore good practices developed at local level to facilitate the participation of rural women in decision-making and to enable the establishment of rural women's organizations.

Following panellist presentations, a moderated debate will begin in which panellists and parliamentarians are invited to respond to the following questions:

- How can rural women be better represented in parliaments?
- How can parliaments better communicate with rural women and girls?
- What good practices exist to ensure that rural women can effectively raise their concerns through parliamentary channels?
- What parliamentary mechanisms are proving best to channel the needs of women and girls?
- Are there success stories of parliamentary responses which helped fulfill specific needs and interests of rural women and girls?
- What good practices have been developed to enhance rural women's participation in decision-making at local level?
- What can help facilitate the establishment of rural women's organizations?

Panellists:

- Ms. Maryam Monsef, Minister of Status of Women of Canada and Mr. Joel Lightbound, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance of Canada
- Ms. Margaret Mensah-Williams, Chairperson of the National Council of Namibia and President of the IPU's Bureau of Women Parliamentarians
- Ms. Delia Canaviri, Member of the Bolivian Chamber of Deputies
- Ms. Marième Baba Sy, Member of the National Assembly of Mauritania
- Ms. Annick Billon, French Senator and Chairperson of the Senate delegation on Women's Rights and Equality between men and women
- Ms. Zoe Carletide, U-Report Manager, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts

12.30 – 1 p.m.

Presentation on “Women in parliament”

- Ms. Zeina Hilal, IPU Gender Partnership Programme

1 – 2.30 p.m.

Lunch break

2.30 – 4.15 p.m.

Session 2: Addressing discrimination against rural women and girls

Rural women and girls face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, injustices and violence. Rural women and girls disproportionately experience poverty and exclusion, discrimination in accessing land ownership and natural resources. They perform the bulk of unpaid care and domestic work within rural families and households. They face de jure and de facto discrimination in land use, access, control, transfer, inheritance, and related decision-making. They are prevented from enjoying labour rights and social protection. Their right to health is often jeopardized by lack of access to health services and to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health rights information and services. Access to school, education and literacy are limited for rural women and girls. Worldwide, rural women and girls have lower levels of literacy, and school attendance for girls is often impacted by the double burden of domestic care responsibilities, long distance to schools and related fear from sexual abuse on the way to school.

Parliaments and their members have a key role to play in ensuring that legal frameworks are non-discriminatory and guarantee access to justice to rural women, and, in exercising their oversight functions, ensuring that laws and policies are conducive to the empowerment of rural women and girls.

Following panellist presentations, a moderated debate will begin in which panellists and parliamentarians are invited to respond to the following questions:

- What progress has been achieved to secure land rights for women?
- What good practices are there that ensure social protection for rural women?
- What is needed to fulfill the promises of access to health for all women and girls? What role for parliament in this regard?
- What prevents rural girls from being at school and what can parliaments do about it?
- Are there examples of where legislation has been enacted to minimize conflicts of laws in plural legal systems (customary/State legislation) to ensure that rural women can claim their rights?
- How can gender-responsive budgeting contribute to overseeing government action to empower rural women and girls?

Panellists:

- Ms. Rana Bandana, Member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- Ms. Rea Abada Chiongson, Gender Advisor, International Development Law Organization (IDLO)
- Ms. Violet Shivutse, Huairou Commission Board of Directors, Founder and Coordinator, Shibuye Community Health Workers, Kenya
- Ms. Maria Lucero Saldaña, President of the Foreign Affairs Committee of NGOs of the Mexican Senate
- Mr. Charles Chauvel, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Ms. Paddy Torsney, IPU Permanent Observer to the UN

4.15 – 5.30 p.m. Session 3: Mitigating the impact of climate change on rural women and girls

Rural communities have an especially close connection to the environment and are disproportionately impacted when the environment is harmed. Rural women's human rights are undermined by the impacts of, as well as responses to, climate change. It is well documented that climate change impacts women differently and more deeply than men;⁶ it is recognized that women are exposed to increased risks because of their primary role in care work and agricultural production and that climate change increases the burden of water and food collection, particularly for rural women.⁷ Rural women are also likely to suffer higher disaster-related mortality and carry the burden of the long-term impacts of loss of land, livelihood and security as a result of climate change.⁸

To mitigate the impacts of climate change on rural women and girls, it is of paramount importance today to build on global mitigation strategies by developing and adopting gender-responsive strategies on mitigation and adaptation to climate change and by giving women agricultural and community leaders a greater voice in discussions about climate change mitigation.

Following panellist presentations, a moderated debate will begin in which panellists and parliamentarians are invited to respond to the following questions:

- What are the specific threats posed to rural women and girls by climate change, natural disasters, land and soil degradation, among others?
- What mitigation strategies are needed to curb climate change impact on rural communities?
- How can parliaments ensure that national strategies to curb climate change are gender-responsive? What can parliaments and their members do in this regard?
- What protection and security measures exist for rural women and girls in all phases of natural disasters and other crises, from early warning to relief, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction?
- How best to hold governments, international institutions, donors and multinational companies accountable for the impact of climate change on rural communities, and the disproportionate impact on rural women and girls?

Panellists:

- Ms. Rana Bandana, Member of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- Ms. Janet Macharia, Head, Gender and Safeguards Unit, UN Environment (UNEP)
- Ms. Anne Kuriakose, Senior Gender Specialist, Climate Investment Funds / World Bank (CIF/WB)
- Ms. Mereseini Vuniwaqa, Minister for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation and Member of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji

5.30 – 5.45 p.m. Concluding remarks

⁶ 52nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Interactive expert panel on Emerging issues, trends and new approaches to issues affecting the situation of women or equality between women and men (28 February 2008), "Gender perspectives on climate change", Issues paper: [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw52/issuespapers/Gender and climate change paper final.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw52/issuespapers/Gender%20and%20climate%20change%20paper%20final.pdf).

⁷ UNFPA, *Making NAPAs work for women*, https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/climateconnections_4_napas.pdf.

⁸ UNDP (2013), *Overview of linkages between gender and climate change*, p. 3; UN Women, Report of the Expert Group Meeting on the CSW 62 (2018) Priority Theme: "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls".