

**Commission on the Status of Women**

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## II. Background

3. The situation of rural women has been an issue of concern to the international community for several decades. The four World Conferences on Women in 1975, 1980, 1985 and 1995, as well as the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2000 (A/RES/S-23/3, annex), explicitly considered this question, and adopted comprehensive sets of policy recommendations as part of their outcome documents. Issues covered by these recommendations included rural women's access to and control over productive resources, such as land, capital, credit and technology, questions of gainful employment and unpaid labour, participation in decision-making, food security issues, and the education and health of rural women.

4. Since 1985, the General Assembly has regularly considered the situation of rural women and adopted resolutions thereon<sup>1</sup>. Recently, the discussion focused on the situation of rural women in the context of emerging global trends and the impact of these trends on rural development. The gender perspectives of issues such as liberalization of trade and markets for food and other agricultural products, the commercialization and modernization of agriculture and the increasing privatization of resources and services received attention, and comprehensive recommendations were proposed to improve the situation of rural women, in particular within the context of globalization<sup>2</sup>.

5. In the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Commission on the Status of Women considered the situation of rural women as a cross-cutting concern within the framework of its deliberations on particular themes, rather than focusing specifically on the situation of rural women. For example, the question of land ownership and access to other productive resources, including water, of rural women was discussed during the fortieth, forty-first and forty-sixth sessions when the Commission considered themes related to the Platform for Action's critical areas of concern on women and poverty, and women and the environment.

6. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is unique among international human rights instruments in addressing the situation of rural women. According to article 14, "States parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the Convention to women in rural areas". The Convention enumerates a range of measures States parties are expected to take to ensure

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<sup>1</sup> See resolutions 40/106 of 13 December 1985, 44/78 of 8 December 1989, 40/109 of 20 December 1993, 50/165 of 22 December 1995, 52/93 of 12 December 1997, 54/135 of 17 December 1999 and 56/129 of 19 December 2001, as well as the Secretary-General's reports contained in A/40/239 and Add.1; A/44/516; A/48/187; A/50/257/rev.1; A/52/326; A/54/123 and A/56/268.

<sup>2</sup> Reports of the Secretary-General on the "Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas", A/54/123 and A/56/268; and GA resolutions 54/135 and 56/129.



- (c) adapt environmental and agricultural policies and mechanisms, when necessary, to incorporate a gender perspective, and in cooperation with civil society, support farmers, particularly women farmers and those living in rural areas, with education and training programmes (A/RES/23-3/3, annex, para. 71 (b));
- (d) strive to reduce the disproportionate number of women living in poverty, in particular rural women, by implementing national poverty eradication programmes with a focus on a gender perspective (A/RES/23-3/3, annex, para. 71 (b));
- (e) undertake socio-economic policies that promote sustainable development and support and ensure poverty eradication programmes... to benefit women of all ages, in particular those living in poverty and marginalized women, including rural women...”(agreed conclusions of CSW, ECOSOC resolution 2002/5, para. 4 (v)).

**Economic empowerment of rural women, including access to and control over productive resources, and rural women’s unpaid work**

9. A number of recommendations focus specifically on enhancing rural women’s access to and control over productive resources, especially land, services (such as extension, training and credit), and markets. They also address ownership and control over land as critical factors that determine access to other productive resources and services, and participation in decision-making processes. The contribution of rural women to the well-being of their families and communities through unpaid work also receives attention. Some examples are given below.

(a) ... attach greater importance to the improvement of the situation of rural women in their national, regional and global development strategies by, inter alia,

- \* designing and revising laws to ensure that, where private ownership of land and property exists, rural women are accorded full and equal rights to own land and other property, including through the right to inheritance, and undertaking administrative reforms and other necessary measures to give women the same right as men to credit, capital, appropriate technologies and access to markets and information (GA resolution 56/129, para. 6 (b));

- \* developing specific assistance programmes and advisory services to promote economic skills of rural women in banking, modern trading and financial procedures and providing microcredit and other financial and business services to a greater number of women in rural areas for their economic empowerment (GA resolution 56/129, para. 6 (i));

(b) Mobilize to protect women's right to full and equal access to economic resources, including the right to inheritance and to ownership of land and other property, credit, natural resources and appropriate technologies (Platform for Action, para 60 (f));

(c) Enhance the access of disadvantaged women, including women entrepreneurs, in rural, remote and urban areas to financial services through strengthening links between

the formal banks and intermediary lending organizations, including legislative support, training for women and institutional strengthening for intermediary institutions with a

10. Rural women's responsibilities for household food provision are addressed in a number of recommendations, reflecting their critical role in this area. Some examples are provided below.

(b)

12. Rural women's role as environmental managers and as key actors in achieving the sustainable development is covered in a number of recommendations. Some examples are provided below.

(a) Take measures to integrate a gender perspective in the design and implementation of, among other things, environmentally sound and sustainable resource management mechanisms, production techniques and infrastructure development in rural and urban areas (Platform for Action, para. 253 (e));

(b) Integrate rural women's traditional knowledge and practices of sustainable resource use and management in the development of environmental management and extension programmes (Platform for Action, para. 256 (d));

(c) Promote knowledge of and sponsor research on the role of women, particularly rural and indigenous women, in food gathering and production, soil conservation, irrigation, watershed management sanitation, coastal zone and marine resource management, integrated pest management, land-use planning, forest conservation and community forestry, fisheries, natural disaster prevention, and new and renewable sources of energy, focusing particularly on indigenous women's knowledge and experience (Platform for Action, para. 256 (f)).