

CSW62 Advocacy Report

Commission on the Status of Women 2018 Ministerial Level Roundtable #1

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The Commission held its first Ministerial - Level Roundtable to discuss the theme of "Good Practices in the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls, including Access to Education, Infrastructure, Technology and Nutrition".

Background: The rights of rural women and girls to quality, affordable education is at the core of SDG 4 and is a stepping stone to economic empowerment and political participation. However, data indicates that rural women and girls lag behind their urban counterparts. Information and Communications Technologies tend to reach rural areas last increasing the digital divide between urban and rural populations of women and girls. Rural women and girls still suffer from a higher rate of malnutrition and food security than all other populations.

Country representatives were asked to share and discuss the steps that their respective governments had taken to support rural women and girls with sustainable energy, transportation, water and sanitation, access to information and communications technologies and food and nutrition.

Here are some of the actions and best practices discussed by Roundtable participants:

Australia: National Broadband and mobile "black spots" networks are being rolled out with the purpose of closing the digital divide between rural and urban areas in the access to information and communications technologies. The government has committed \$220 million to the "Black Spot" Program.

Cote d'Ivoire: The government has made digital inclusion a priority and training in the use of digital tablets is available to women in general. Special funds have been created to encourage women's economic empowerment, especially in rural areas and funding for healthcare is increasing.

Paraguay: Legislation aimed at empowering women in economic, social, political and cultural areas has been in place since 2015. The next step is the adoption and implementation of policies based on this legislation which cover among other rights, access to land.

Switzerland: Asked participants to suggest ways in which to engage men and boys in promoting rural gender equality. Norway suggested that "mixed- gender" teams working on gender equality are one option to help raise the awareness of men and boys.

Saudi Arabia: The government is taking steps and measures to support rural girls' retention in schools. Financial incentives are in place to encourage teachers to work in remote rural areas.

Mali: The country is living through violent terrorism and child mortality is on the rise. Terrorists are forcing girls into marriage and rape is being committed with impunity. The situation in Mali is precarious and the rural economy is paralyzed.

China: Status of women in China is inseparable from agricultural development which the Communist Party has designated as a priority at its National Congress in 2017. 99.0 percent of rural girls are enrolled in schools. Women's organizations are providing training to 3 million women. Healthcare includes free breast cancer screenings. Rural women are encouraged to participate in e-commerce and the wider digital economy and there is a system of micro-credit to support women who are rural entrepreneurs.

Also participating in this Roundtable were high-level representatives from a host of other countries.

GWI Analytical Note:

While the discussion on actions and best practices by various country governments was heartening, the biggest problem still remains in the area of implementation of gender-responsive policies, legislation and programs across countries, particularly in rural areas. Also, there seems to be a dearth of truly innovative ideas and practices expressed in the course of the discussion.

While governments can be labelled "slow to implement" for a number of reasons. GWI believes that the gaps between existing gender-responsive national plans and implementation is also the result of conflicts between a country's obligation to abide by global policies and the need to enact and implement national policies in favor of rural populations. (You will note that this was cited as the #1 Barrier in the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls in the Expert Group Meeting that preceded CSW2018).

GWI believes that rural transformations that support women require three things:

- 1) "out of the box" thinking,
- 2) an understanding of the diversity within the world's population of rural women and girls - one solution does not fit all rural women and girls and
- 3) Reconciliation of global and national policies so that human rights can flourish alongside trade and development.

If NFAs would like to build additional knowledge about the intersection of global and national policies as they impact human rights and development, please write to me and we will schedule a conversation that is specific to your country.

Sincerely,
Geeta