

# CSW62 Advocacy Report

## Commission on the Status of Women 2018

### Introduction

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Today is March 12, 2018 and the first day of the annual CSW meeting. It's 6:AM on a cold crisp late-winter morning and our GWI delegates are meeting shortly for their morning briefing on the day's events before their foray into the exciting world of the UN.

This year's **Priority theme** is: *“Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls”*; And the **Review theme** is: *“Participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women”*.

Rural women are not a homogenous group: they may be small farmers with ownership rights, farmers or forest users on collective or common land, waged farmers, workers in secondary and non-farm industries, pastoralists, fishers, and peasants. They also may be girls, parents, widows, indigenous women, women with disabilities, women living with HIV or other diseases, and women of diverse sexual orientations and/or gender identities.

The social and economic injustices rural women continue to experience should not be inevitable; they are the result of global and local policymaking intersecting with entrenched patriarchal practices.

As you know, preparations for this annual meeting begin much in advance of the meeting itself and these preparations notably include The Expert Group Meeting which is responsible for framing the issue within the most current research on the social, economic and political factors that impact the issue.

Here then is the contextual framework:

#### **Barriers to Rural Women's Empowerment**

1) The Neo- Liberal Economic Model - Privatization of public goods and services, deregulation of corporations, labor and financial markets and trade and investment liberalization, and the subsequent adoption of global regulations that protect foreign capital and constrain the State's capacity to legislate in favor of human rights.

2) Climate change: Climate change impacts women differently than men; Women are at increased risk because of their primary role in care work and agricultural production and climate change increases the burden of water and food collection, particularly for rural women.

3) Land Grabbing: International and national investors have long displaced rural peoples from their land for investment purposes, which at a global level is increasing and causing significant impact on all rural people with a heightened impact on rural women.

4) Land tenure rights: Women do not have the full complement of Tenure Rights which go beyond the right to “own” land, and include use, access, control, transfer, exclusion, inheritance, and all decision-making about land and land-related resources.

5) Access to Water and Water Grabbing: Rural women and girls are the most water insecure. They are disproportionately responsible for water fetching for domestic uses and for irrigation, but they often lack access to affordable and appropriate water infrastructure or quality which are increasingly owned by multinationals.

6) Energy Democracy Access: Access to renewable, clean, safe, predictable energy has the capacity to alleviate some of the unpaid work burden on rural women and increase health and livelihood standards in rural areas. However, electrification in rural areas has commonly been associated with mega-energy projects and extractive industries which disproportionately and adversely affect rural women.

7) Instruments for Land, Water and Other Resources Two instruments have been developed to guide investments in agriculture: The Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security adopted by the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS), and the Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment (PRAI), led by the CFS. However, the voluntary nature of both instruments means that communities impacted by such displacements have few remedies available.

8) Food Sovereignty: This is the inalienable right to adequate food and freedom from hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition not routinely available for rural women. It is the responsibility of governments to create environments in which people can meet their dietary and nutritional needs whilst participating in decision-making over their own food production and consumption.

7) Tariffs and Subsidies The removal of tariffs on imports means that subsidized food can flood a local market, often with lower quality food, driving down prices and displacing local women’s produce, which consequently threatens food sovereignty and sustainability

8) Intellectual Property Protections: States and UN treaty bodies have recognized the detrimental impact that the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) can have on rural women’s human rights. Rural women routinely save and share seeds as a way of ensuring sustainability, resilience, and biodiversity, and reducing input costs. Several trade agreements include intellectual property protections that effectively prevent farmers from selling or exchanging seeds or selling produce harvested from saved seeds. TRIPs allow Agri-food companies to utilize both the plant breeder rights restrictions and patent protections.

9) Pesticides: Seed monopolies are closely linked to pesticide monopolies. In the chemical industry, three powerful corporations: Monsanto and Bayer, Dow and Dupont, and Syngenta and ChemChina, control more than 65 percent of global pesticide sales, as well as almost 61 percent of commercial seed sales.

10) Decent Work: Rural women's labor rights, whether paid or unpaid, are covered by the core ILO conventions, CEDAW, as well as specific conventions relating to women workers and rural workers. Yet in very few countries do rural women workers enjoy the rights afforded through these conventions

11) Health Rights: Due to infrastructural barriers, high illiteracy rates and overall inequality in distribution of health resources, rural women and girls are unable to access comprehensive sexual and reproductive health rights information and services.

12) Social Protection: Of all women, rural women have the fewest social protections that would guarantee social assistance, social insurance programs and labor market programs which are crucial to reducing poverty, improving income security, mitigating hunger and malnutrition and enabling access to better nutrition, health care and education.

### **Pre-requisites for the Empowerment of Rural Women**

1) A fundamental reorientation away from the neo-liberal economic consensus to one that focuses on common good and a restorative, thriving natural environment.

2) Rural and indigenous women can play an important role in facilitating a transition towards a more equitable and sustainable economy. They must not, however, be required to shoulder the burden of the world's climate change mitigation and adaptation obligations. States must renew their social contracts with rural women in support of this transition.

3) Public - Private Partnerships that target human development outcomes in rural areas

4) Investment in public health and care facilities that would benefit rural women

5) The coming together of women in groups and social movements is central to the advancement of rural women's social, economic and political rights. The largest global study on violence against women found that the key to achieving progressive changes to laws and policies on violence against women is the existence of autonomous feminist movements.

6) Governments, their development partners and traditional leadership at all levels, need to protect self-respect for rural women by fighting cultural, political or religious situations and beliefs that expose women's bodies to violations and exploitation

**GWJ has been contributing systematically over the last few months to the draft of the CSW 2018 Agreed Conclusions document and looks forward to working with its NFAs at the intersection of global and national policies as they affect all women and girls including rural women and girls.**

Sincerely  
Geeta.