



GRADUATE WOMEN INTERNATIONAL TOOLKIT

International Day of Rural Women

Rural Women Cultivating Good Food for All

15 OCTOBER 2021



Empowering women and girls through lifelong education for leadership, decision-making and peace. GWI, formerly IFUW, is in special consultative status with ECOSOC since 1947 and is an NGO maintaining official relations with UNESCO and ILO.

Graduate Women International

Chemin du Balxert 9, Chatelaine, 1291 Switzerland

E-mail: gwi@graduatewomen.org Website: www.graduatewomen.org

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International Day of
**RURAL
 WOMEN**

2021 THEME: RURAL WOMEN CULTIVATING GOOD FOOD FOR ALL

Observed annually on 15 October since 2008, the International Day of Rural Women recognises "the **critical role and contribution of rural women, including indigenous women, in enhancing agricultural and rural development, improving food security and eradicating rural poverty**" (1). On this occasion, GWI, as an organisation committed to the empowerment of all women and girls, celebrates the limitless potential of rural women and girls:

- Rural women - a quarter of the world's population - work as farmers, wage earners, and entrepreneurs.
- Less than 20% of landholders worldwide are women. In rural areas, the gender pay gap is as high as 40%
- Reducing the gap in labour force participation rates between men and women by 25% by the year 2025 could raise global GDP by 3.9%.
- If women in rural areas had the same access to agricultural assets, education, and markets as men, agricultural production could be increased, and the number of hungry people reduced by 100-150 million.

(Source: International Labour Organisation)



Rural women and girls, including indigenous women and girls, quite literally carry the world on their shoulders by ensuring the sustainability of rural households and communities, improving rural livelihoods and overall well-being as well as performing the bulk of unpaid care and domestic work within families and households in rural areas (2).

Yet, women and girls are disadvantaged in this pandemic, a problem aggravated in rural areas. Rural women, with a crucial role in agriculture, food security and nutrition, already face struggles in their daily lives. Now, since COVID-19 and their unique health needs in remote areas, they are less likely to have access to quality health services, essential medicines, and vaccines. Restrictive social norms and gender stereotypes can also limit rural women's ability to access health services. Furthermore, a lot of rural women suffer from isolation, as well as the spread of misinformation, and a lack of access to critical technologies to improve their work and personal life (United Nations 2021).

GWl is particularly concerned by their lack of safe and equal access to lifelong and quality education, when education is precisely the most powerful transformative tools to break the cycle of poverty. Early and forced marriage, gender discrimination, lack of access to water and sanitation, geographical isolation, lack of female teachers and lack of sustainable public services are some of the many issues that keep rural women and girls out of school.



1.7 billion

There can be no sustainable development without empowering the 1.7 billion women and girls who live in rural areas. (IFAD)



39%

Only 39% of rural girls attend secondary school. (UN Women)



More than half

of all poor rural women lack basic literacy skills. (UN Women)



Rural girls are **2x more** likely to be victims of early and forced marriage than their urban counterparts* (UN Women).

*In some African, Latin American and Caribbean countries





THE TIME IS NOW TO INVEST IN RURAL WOMEN AND GIRLS

Despite certain progress, GWI sees the plethora of discrimination and impediments that rural women and girls are faced with during the COVID-19 pandemic as an unjust restriction of their limitless potential as well as a blatant violation of their human rights. This is why, on the occasion of International Day of Rural Women and Girls 2021, GWI renews its commitment to empowering all women and girls around the world, including rural women and girls. (3)

The classic definition of empowerment refers to the process by which those who have previously been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability. This description remains widely accepted. GWI believes that education is a precondition for empowerment and that rural women and girls must have access to quality sustained education to inform their life choices and positively impact the trajectories of their lives.

Additionally, GWI maintains that empowerment includes the knowledge of the full and indivisible complement of human rights particularly the right to freedom of choice that can help women and girls reach their full potential as contributing members of society and leaders in their chosen fields.

Knowledge of their human rights will foster women's and girls' deeper belief in their self-worth that will empower them to move beyond any dominant and repressive structures that hinder their progress. GWI sees the education of rural women and girls through multiple lenses but considers access to agricultural training, equal land rights, access to public services and infrastructures, financial literacy, and a secondary education as indispensable to their empowerment.

Rural Women and Girls need:
secondary education with opportunities for lifelong learning
agricultural training
equal land rights
public services and infrastructures





RURAL WOMEN AND GIRLS AND THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

On the occasion of International Day of Rural Women 2021, GWI draws attention to the strength and vitality of rural women and girls and underlines the importance of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with respect to rural women and girls. Investing in rural women and girls is essential for the achievement of the SDGs and the creation of a better future for the global community.

GWI drives particular attention to SDG4 and 5, which together seek to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning (SDG4) and to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (SDG5). It should be noted however that all 17 SDGs are intricately related both to themselves and to the empowerment of rural women and girls, and they may only be fully achieved through the realisation of all of them.

In order to make solid progress towards meeting the targets for the SDGs, GWI and its National Federations and Associations (NFAs) in 55 countries, with Independent Members in 16 additional countries, call all stakeholders - including States, public, private and civil society organisations - to fully invest in the future of rural women and girls and the SDGs. To encourage this effort, GWI produced this awareness building document drawing attention to the intrinsic link between the realisation of the SDGs and the protection of rural women and girls' rights.



The empowerment of rural women and girls is essential to building a prosperous, equitable and peaceful future for all on a healthy planet"

Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General ⁽⁴⁾





RURAL WOMEN AND GIRLS AND THE SDGS IN FOCUS



Globally, 1 in 5 girls are in households living on less than US\$1.90 a day, a sum that leaves them without enough food, housing, health care or education. While extreme poverty has declined at the global level, the world's 1 billion people who continue to live in unacceptable conditions of poverty are heavily concentrated in rural areas (5). **Women farmers may be as productive and enterprising as their male counterparts, but are less able to access land, credit, agricultural inputs and markets** (6).

In nearly two thirds of countries, women are more likely than men to face food insecurity: roughly 60% of chronically hungry people are women and girls, with a majority living in rural areas (7). **The UN has estimated that bringing female farmers' yields to the level of those produced by men could reduce the number of hungry people by 100 million. To fulfill the goal of SDG 2, education is key; girls education contributes 43% to the reduction in child malnutrition over time, while food availability accounted for 26%** (8).



Healthy lives and well-being may be interrupted by a variety of issues. **The health of rural women and girls can be put at risk by lack of access to health services and infrastructures:** in low income countries, rural women are 38% less likely to give birth with a health care worker than an urban women: this puts them at risk of life-threatening complications (9). Because rural girls are more at risk of child and forced marriage, they are at higher risk of intimate partner violence, early pregnancy, maternal complications and STDs.

Around the world, 263 million children are not receiving an education, 130 million of whom are girls. In rural communities, the problem is especially critical where only 39% of rural girls are known to attend school compared to 45% of rural boys (10). **Rural girls are twice as likely to be out of school than urban girls** (11). Every study shows that education leads to better nutrition, improved health, reductions in domestic violence, child and forced marriages and early pregnancies. Irrefutably, education empowers rural women and girls and without education, the combination of all of these threats diminishes their empowerment.



Worldwide, gender inequality remains an issue in dire need of being addressed as it deprives rural women and girls of their basic rights and opportunities. **Globally, rural women and girls are disproportionately affected by multiple forms of gender based violence (GBV) and discrimination, such as child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)** (12). The empowerment of rural women and girls necessitates concerted efforts and a renewed focus on combatting stereotypes, prejudices and GBV to counter deeply rooted discrimination often resulting from patriarchal attitudes and related social norms.

2.1 billion people lacked access to safely managed drinking water services. **When water is not available in the home – as is the case in many rural areas in developing countries – women and girls are most often tasked with collecting it**, travelling long distances and carrying heavy loads that can severely affect their health (13). This takes a significant amount of time and limits their engagement in other activities such as paid work and education.





In many rural households around the world, **lack of access to affordable, reliable and safe sources of energy severely impact women and girls**. In 2012, over four million people died prematurely from indoor air pollution which is caused by cooking with solid fuel or heating with unsafe fuel. 60% of those who died were women and girls (14). Furthermore, many rural girls and women spend hours each day collecting fuel and carrying heavy loads: this substantially reduces their opportunities such as investing in their educational advancement.

Around the world, **one in three employed women works in agriculture, accounting for a substantial proportion of the agricultural labour force** (15). But too often, women are trapped in the informal part of the agricultural sector, in which low or no pay, abuse and exploitation are unfortunately common (16). As a result, rural women and girls suffer disproportionately from multi-dimensional poverty, lack of social protection and are more at risk of exploitation.



Research and innovation drive the knowledge economy, and are the backbone of future jobs, yet women alarmingly hold less than a third of research positions. Similar gaps apply to the construction, manufacturing and energy businesses, which still have too few women employees and decision-makers. Without the inclusion of rural women and girls, who are often the guardians of **invaluable traditional knowledge about biodiversity and indigenous technologies, the whole world is missing out** (17).

With less income and fewer assets than men and the majority of their urban counterparts, **rural women and girls are more likely to live below 50% of median income and experience extreme forms of poverty and exclusion** (18). In order to reduce all inequalities, eliminating gender inequality is in urgent need of being fulfilled. GWI appeals to the international community to promote the active combatting of all forms of unjust inequality within and between communities.



By 2030, a historic 60% of people worldwide will likely live in cities (19). But to ensure sustainable cities and communities, there is a **vital need to ensure the sustainability of rural communities first**. When rural communities are crippled by poverty, rural women and girls are too often forced to move to urban slums, for lack of income, where they continue to face multiple challenges, including exclusion, discrimination, violence and lack of sanitation facilities.

The global material footprint is rapidly growing, outpacing population and economic growth: if the global population reaches 9.6 billion by 2050, the equivalent of almost three planets will be required to sustain current lifestyles (20). Unsustainable consumption drives climate change and the **destruction of the environment, which disproportionately affects the lives and opportunities of rural women and girls**. GWI calls for the immediate adoption of gender-responsive climate policies promoting rural women's leadership.



As the world faces an increasingly critical need to act against climate change, **the important role that rural women and girls play in building resilience is unquestionable**: they are at the front of the battle lines when natural resources and agriculture is threatened. They also suffer disproportionately from climate disasters, as they are more likely to die during those disasters (21). Furthermore, climate change exacerbates existing inequalities, potentially leaving rural women and girls further behind.



The world's oceans - spreading over 70% of the planet - are in crisis from decimated fish stocks, pollution and acidification. **Women face the risks of ocean degradation with fewer assets and alternatives for income, and less resilience against mounting losses** (22). The contamination of the world's oceans affects women's livelihoods, but also their health and the health of their children. GWI urges collective mindfulness that conservation and sustainable development with regard to marine resources is necessary in order to preserve our oceans and the rights of rural women and girls.

Women and girls, particularly those who are poor and living in rural areas, often depend on forests for fuel, fodder and food. Yet, their **limited ownership of land reduces their capacity to adapt to losses or to make decisions about how land is used** (23). While most have extensive knowledge of traditions that are inherently sustainable, they are all **too often excluded from decisions about sustainable ecosystems**. GWI urges the global community to recognise women and girls' dependence on lands such as forests and to engage in protecting terrestrial ecosystems.



Disproportionately, women and girls, and even more predominantly rural and indigenous women and girls, remain poorly represented in formal mechanisms for negotiating and sustaining peace (24). This is discriminatory, entrenching gender disparities, as rural women and girls' voices are muted in decision-making processes. GWI persistently promotes the achievement of SDG16 of achieving peaceful, inclusive and sustainable societies, through the eradication of gender inequality.

Success of the SDGs depends on sufficient means to implement them, underpinned by a strong commitment to solidarity and cooperation. GWI advocates for the recognition that the SDGs will not be achieved without international solidarity and collaboration, calling on the global community to foster strategic partnerships with governments, private companies and institutions which can act as thought leaders and financiers, helping to provide lifelong learning opportunities and a place at the decision table for rural women and girls.





About GWI

Graduate Women International (GWI) is a membership-based international Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) located in Geneva, Switzerland, with presence in some 60 countries with our National Federation and Associations (NFAs) and Independent Members. Founded in 1919, GWI is the leading girls' and women's global organisation advocating for women's rights, equality and empowerment through access to quality education and training up to the highest levels. GWI is in special consultative status with ECOSOC since 1947 and maintains official relations with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

GWI operates with a small yet dedicated staff consisting of an Executive Director and a host of committed interns and volunteers. Additionally, our work is possible with the support of our tireless Board of Directors.



Stacy Dry Lara
Executive Director

Media contact: sdl@graduatewomen.org
Programmes: info@graduatewomen.org
Advocacy partners: cm@graduatewomen.org
Membership: membership@graduatewomen.org



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since 1919***



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gwi@graduatewomen.org



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