



Commission on the Status of Women
Contribution to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
“Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies”
April 2018

The universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development confirms the centrality of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls to sustainable development and poverty eradication, and for progress across all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets. It envisaged a world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed.

In addressing its priority and review themes since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Commission has consistently built synergies between the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women, and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In this regard, the Commission emphasizes the important contribution of women and girls to sustainable development. It has reiterated that gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and women’s full and equal participation and leadership in the economy are vital for achieving sustainable development, promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies, enhancing sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and productivity, ending poverty in all its forms everywhere and ensuring the well-being of all.

At its sixtieth session in March 2016, the Commission adopted a comprehensive roadmap with recommendations on how Governments and other stakeholders should proceed with the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development so as to reach the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by 2030, and with significant and measurable progress already by 2020. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that no woman and no girl is left behind.

In March 2018, at its sixty-second session, the Commission considered “Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls” as its priority theme. In its agreed conclusions, the Commission emphasized the mutually reinforcing relationship among achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, including those in rural areas, and the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. With the focus on women and girls in rural areas, the agreed conclusions draw strong linkages to Goal 5, Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls and its targets. They also extensively align the situation of women and girls in rural areas with the Goals under review by the HLPF in 2018, namely, Goals 6, 7, 11, 12, 15, 17, as well as other SDGs. This confirms and reinforces the Commission’s echoing of the need for the 2030 Agenda to be systematically implemented in a gender-responsive manner.

1. An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind” at the global level

With its focus on the situation of women and girls in rural areas as its priority theme, the Commission demonstrated its commitment to the principle of ‘leave no one behind’ and

provided an extensive agenda for action in response. It acknowledged that all rural women and girls often face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and marginalization. They continue to be economically and socially disadvantaged due to, inter alia, their limited or lack of access to economic resources and opportunities, decent work, social protection, quality education, public health, justice, sustainable and time- and labour-saving infrastructure and technology, land, water and sanitation and other resources, as well as to financial services, credit, extension services and agricultural inputs as well as their limited financial inclusion.

While respecting and valuing the diversity of rural women's situations and conditions, the Commission also recognized that some face particular barriers to their empowerment. In this regard, it gave attention to specific groups of women and girls living in rural and remote areas, namely, indigenous women and girls, women and girls with disabilities, women and girls of African descent, women migrants, and older women including widowed women. It also drew attention to instances of young women, including adolescents that require specific attention. And it gave systematic attention to the situation of girls in rural areas.

2. The identification of gaps, areas requiring urgent attention, risks and challenges

The Commission provided a detailed assessment of the challenges to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls, including the persistence of historical and structural unequal power relations between women and men, poverty, inequalities and disadvantages in access to, ownership and control over resources. It was concerned that this group of women faces growing gaps in equality of opportunity and limited access to universal healthcare services and secondary and post-secondary education, as well as challenges such as gender-based violence, discriminatory laws and policies, and negative social norms and gender stereotypes. The unequal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work also is a challenge. The Commission stressed the urgency of eliminating all structural barriers to realize gender equality and empower rural women and girls.

Furthermore, the Commission drew linkages between the challenges posed by climate change to poverty eradication and the achievement of sustainable development and gender inequalities. In particular, owing to such inequalities, rural women and girls, especially in developing countries, including small island developing states, are often disproportionately affected by the adverse impacts of climate change, extreme weather events and natural disasters and other environmental issues.

As a consequence, the Commission called for strengthening and building the resilience and adaptive capacity of all rural women and girls to respond to and recover from economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters, humanitarian emergencies and adverse impacts of climate change, natural disasters and extreme weather events. Provision of essential infrastructure, services, appropriate financing, technology, and social protection, humanitarian relief, forecast and early warning systems, and decent work for women are identified as some of the measures needed.

Furthermore, among its many action recommendations, the Commission called for investing in gender-responsive and quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, such as safe drinking water and sanitation for all, affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy, safe,

affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems, water for irrigation, technology, and on safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport and roads in facilitating transport linkages on domestic routes and promoting urban-rural connectivity to empower women and girls.

3. Valuable lessons learned on transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies

The important role and contribution of rural women and girls to rural development, poverty eradication, sustainable development and the building of resilient societies is well documented. In its agreed conclusions, the Commission emphasized this point extensively. For example, rural women make crucial contributions to local and national economies, to food production and the achievement of food security and improved nutrition, as well as to the well-being of families and communities. Strengthening sustainable production and consumption patterns, including family farming, respecting and protecting traditional and ancestral knowledge and practices of rural women, adds to resilience.

Such transformation can also be enhanced by mainstreaming a gender perspective in decision-making processes and the management of natural resources, and by strengthening rural women's and girls' voice, agency, participation and leadership. Civil society, including women's and community-based organizations, feminist groups, women human rights defenders, girls' and youth-led organizations and trade unions play a valuable role in placing the interests, needs and visions of women and girls, including those living in rural areas, on local, national, regional and international agendas, including the 2030 Agenda.

4. Emerging issues likely to affect building sustainable and resilient societies

The Commission on the Status of Women has consistently called for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against all women and girls, and the implementation of targeted measures to address, inter alia, the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination they face. It has stressed that while all women and girls have the same human rights, rural women and girls in different contexts have particular needs and priorities, requiring appropriate responses.

5. Areas where political guidance by the High-level Political Forum is required

The Commission once again stressed the critical importance of addressing and integrating gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls throughout the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to ensure synergies between the follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action and the gender-responsive follow-up to the 2030 Agenda.

6. Policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress in establishing sustainable and resilient societies

The Commission highlighted policies and actions to be undertaken by governments and other actors in the following three key areas: strengthening normative, legal and policy frameworks; implementing economic and social policies for the empowerment of all rural women and girls; and strengthening collective voice, leadership and decision-making.