



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
24 July 2023

Original: English

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## Seventy-eighth session

Item 140 of the provisional agenda\*

### Advancement of women

## Improvement of the situation of women and girls in rural areas

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

Pursuant to General Assembly resolution [76/140](#), the present report provides a review of the policies and initiatives undertaken by Member States and United Nations entities to improve the livelihoods, well-being and resilience of women and girls in rural areas, in particular the poorest and most marginalized. The advancements made in that regard support the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, helping to ensure that no women or girls in rural areas are left behind in its implementation, monitoring and results (see Assembly resolution [70/1](#)). The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Assembly.

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\* [A/78/150](#).



## I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [76/140](#) on the improvement of the situation of women and girls in rural areas, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the resolution at its seventy-eighth session. The present report provides a review of the situation of women and girls in rural areas since the seventy-sixth session, taking into consideration the spiralling effects of the cost-of-living crisis, climate and environment emergencies and the lingering effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic that have compounded underlying and persistent gender gaps and inequalities. In addition, it provides an overview of the efforts of Member States, the United Nations system and other actors to respond to the challenges facing women and girls in rural areas, in particular the poorest and most marginalized, and create enabling conditions for their sustainable livelihoods, well-being and resilience in a time of mounting crises that threaten the advancements that have been made in gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.

2. The present report covers national efforts to improve the situation of women and girls in rural areas by: (a) investing in and strengthening the economic empowerment of rural women; (b) improving rural women's access to and control of land, water and other natural resources; (c) ensuring the food security and nutrition of rural women and girls; (d) improving social protection for rural women and girls; (e) ensuring the full and equal participation of rural women and girls in decision-making; and (g) strengthening the collection, analysis and dissemination of sex- and age-disaggregated data and gender statistics.<sup>1</sup> The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Assembly.

3. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development constitutes an overarching and transformative framework that brings attention to the imperative of rural development and the empowerment of rural women and girls. In the 2030 Agenda, Member States are called upon to invest in sustainable agriculture and fisheries and to support women farmers, herders and fishers in developing countries, in particular the least developed countries. Of particular relevance, among other Sustainable Development Goals, are Goal 1 to end poverty in all its forms everywhere, Goal 2 to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture, Goal 5 to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, Goal 13 to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, and Goal 15 to protect, restore and promote the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

4. In the twenty-fifth anniversary review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,<sup>2</sup> the Secretary-General highlights the importance of addressing rural women's disproportionate poverty, illiteracy, share of unpaid care and domestic work, and vulnerability to environmental degradation and climate change, and the corresponding necessity to improve their livelihoods,

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<sup>1</sup> Submissions were received from 31 Member States (Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Guatemala, Honduras, Ireland, Mauritania, Mexico, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Panama, Poland, Senegal, Serbia, Togo, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uruguay and Zimbabwe) and from 5 United Nations entities (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Telecommunication Union, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and World Food Programme (WFP)).

<sup>2</sup> [E/CN.6/2020/3](#).

employment opportunities and outcomes, and access to social protection, public services, sustainable infrastructure and productive resources.

5. The priority theme of the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women put the spotlight on the challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.<sup>3</sup> In the agreed conclusions of that session,<sup>4</sup> the Commission set forth tangible measures that Member States should take in order to overcome persistent gender inequalities, discrimination and structural barriers and support the rights, well-being and resilience of rural women and girls. The Commission reviewed the implementation of those agreed conclusions at its sixty-seventh session in March 2023.<sup>5</sup>

6. In article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the States Parties are called upon to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against rural women. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, in its general recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women ([CEDAW/C/GC/34](#)), recognizes that rural women in both developing and developed countries are deeply affected by poverty, economic and political exclusion, climate change and natural disasters, and lack of access to infrastructure, services and social protection. The recommendation underscores that rural development policies continue to overlook the priorities and rights of women, including those of women farmers and migrant women workers employed in agriculture.

7. The Committee, in its general recommendation No. 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change ([CEDAW/C/GC/37](#)), notes that rural and indigenous women are directly affected by the impacts of climate change and disasters as food producers and agricultural workers. Their climate resilience is compromised by insecure land tenure, poor land quality, and outmigration of men that leaves them to shoulder farming responsibilities on their own. Climate-related resource scarcity also increases their exposure to violence.

8. The Committee, in its general recommendation No. 39 (2022) on the rights of Indigenous women and girls ([CEDAW/C/GC/39](#)), calls on the States Parties to the Convention to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against Indigenous women and girls living in rural, remote and urban areas and to enable the realization of their rights to effective participation in political and public life; land, territories and natural resources; food, seeds and water; a clean, healthy and sustainable environment; culture, education, work and health; and to ensure that they have access to justice and effective remedies in case of violations.

9. In the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, the General Assembly recognizes that peasants and other people living in rural areas have the right to land, individually and/or collectively, including the right to have access to, sustainably use and manage land and the water bodies, coastal seas, fisheries, pastures and forests therein, to achieve an adequate standard of living, to have a place to live in with security, peace and dignity and to develop their cultures. It recognizes that peasant women and other women working in rural areas should enjoy without discrimination the right to equal access to, use of and management of land and natural resources, and to equal or priority treatment in land and agrarian reform and in land resettlement schemes.

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<sup>3</sup> See [E/CN.6/2018/3](#).

<sup>4</sup> [E/2018/27](#).

<sup>5</sup> [E/CN.6/2023/4](#).

10. The General Assembly, in its resolution [76/300](#) on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, recognizes both the threat that environmental degradation, climate change, biodiversity loss, desertification and unsustainable development pose to the enjoyment of human rights by present and future generations, in particular women and girls, and the importance of gender-responsive action and women's and girls' participation, decision-making and leadership in safeguarding the environment.

## II. Data and trends

11. According to the World Bank, in 2022, an estimated 43 per cent of the world's population, or more than 3 billion people, lived in rural areas,<sup>6</sup> as did some 80 per cent of the extreme poor.<sup>7</sup> More than 1 billion people are employed in agrifood systems, with women representing about half of those workers.<sup>8</sup> Agriculture continues to be the most important employment sector for women in low-income and lower-middle-income countries, although they are relegated to informal, low-paid, low-skilled, labour-intensive and vulnerable jobs. In 2021, an estimated 25 per cent of employed women around the world worked in agriculture, including forestry and fishing.<sup>9</sup> Nearly 4 billion people live in households that rely at least in part on agrifood livelihoods.<sup>10</sup> These households, already highly vulnerable to the effects of economic, environmental and climate shocks,<sup>11</sup> were left exposed to the disruptions in the supply chain and the unprecedented spikes in food, fuel and fertilizer prices that occurred in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Global poverty rose in 2020 for the first time in over three decades, with an additional 75 million to 95 million people falling into extreme poverty in the wake of the combined crises.<sup>12</sup> This increase in poverty, along with disproportionate gendered impacts, has left rural women and girls even further behind.<sup>13</sup>

12. Well before the COVID-19 and cost-of-living crises had begun, rural women and girls were at greater risk of rising poverty, food insecurity, violence and exclusion because of the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that they face on the basis of sex, age, income, location, marital and head of household status, race or ethnicity, culture, indigenous status, sexual orientation and gender identity, and as widows, women affected by HIV/AIDS, women with disabilities and women

<sup>6</sup> World Bank, "Rural population (% of total population)", World Bank Open Data. Available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS>. By contrast, in 1960, a total of 66 per cent of the world's population lived in rural areas.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Davis and others, "Do not transform food systems on the backs of the rural poor", *Food Security*, vol. 14, 729–740 (2022).

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Davis and others, "Estimating global and country-level employment in agrifood systems", *FAO Statistics Working Paper Series*, Issue 23/34 (Rome, 2023).

<sup>9</sup> World Bank, "Employment in agriculture, female (% of female employment)", World Bank Open Data. Available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.FE.ZS?view=chart>. By contrast, in 1991, a total of 42 per cent of employed women worked in agriculture.

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Davis and others, "Estimating global and country-level employment in agrifood systems".

<sup>11</sup> International Food Policy Research Institute, *Global Food Policy Report 2020* (Washington, D.C., 2020); and FAO, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), WFP and World Health Organization (WHO), *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022: Repurposing food and agricultural policies to make healthy diets more affordable* (Rome, 2022).

<sup>12</sup> *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023* (United Nations publication, 2023) (forthcoming).

<sup>13</sup> UN-Women, *Global Gendered Impacts of the Ukraine Crisis on Energy Access and Food Security and Nutrition* (New York, 2022); [A/76/241](#); and [A/77/243](#).

migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons.<sup>14</sup> Virtually every global gender and development indicator that includes data from the 2010s showed that rural women lagged behind rural men and urban women and men.<sup>15</sup>

13. These entrenched gender inequalities also mean that rural women and girls are much less likely to receive the support and services they need. There are marked disparities between rural and urban areas in respect of the adequacy and quality of social protection, with rural women and girls receiving the least protection.<sup>16</sup> The intensification of women's paid and unpaid care work in times of crisis (care for children, the sick and the elderly) has been compounded in rural areas by limited access to social, care and health services and to clean, safe and affordable water, sanitation and energy.<sup>17</sup>

14. While the use of safely managed drinking water rose between 2000 and 2020 from 62 to 74 per cent of the global population, 2.2 billion people still lack this basic service.<sup>18</sup> That figure includes 1.2 billion people who do not even have access to basic drinking water, 80 per cent of whom live in rural areas and half of whom live in the least developed countries.<sup>19</sup> An estimated 3.6 billion persons, or 46 per cent of the world's population, lack access to safely managed sanitation.<sup>20</sup> According to the World Bank, in 2020, a total of 62 per cent of urban populations had access to safely managed sanitation, compared with 44 per cent in rural areas.<sup>21</sup> These stark gaps continue to be filled by rural women's and girls' unpaid care work to safeguard and manage domestic water and sanitation.<sup>22</sup> Rural women's and girls' energy poverty and unequal energy access have been exacerbated as the costs of oil and gas soared because of the war in Ukraine, compounding the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, people in developing countries have lost recently gained energy access to or find themselves unable to pay for modern fuels, including for clean cooking.<sup>23</sup>

15. In 2023, an unprecedented 345.2 million people are expected to be food-insecure, more than double the number in 2020, and 43.3 million people across 51 countries are at serious risk of famine.<sup>24</sup> It is estimated that 50 million people faced emergency or worse levels of acute food insecurity across 45 countries owing to the spiralling costs of food, fuel and fertilizer in the wake of the war in Ukraine and accelerating climate change.<sup>25</sup> Critically, a widening gender gap in food insecurity, which grew from 1.7 per cent in 2019 to 4.3 in 2021, with 31.9 per cent of women in a state of moderate or severe food insecurity compared with 27.6 per cent of men, means that women around the world and across regions are more food-insecure than

<sup>14</sup> UN-Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2015–2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights* (New York, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> See [E/CN.6/2018/3](#).

<sup>16</sup> International Labour Organization, *World Social Protection Report 2020–22* (Geneva, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> UN-Women, *COVID-19 and the Care Economy: Immediate Action and Structural Transformation for a Gender-responsive Recovery* (New York, 2020).

<sup>18</sup> United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023*.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022* (United Nations publication, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *The United Nations World Water Development Report 2023: Partnerships and Cooperation for Water* (Paris, 2023).

<sup>21</sup> World Bank, "People using safely managed sanitation services, urban (% of urban population)", World Bank Open Data. Available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.STA.SMSS.UR.ZS>. By contrast, in 2000, a total of 45 per cent of urban populations had access to safely managed sanitation, compared with 15 per cent in rural areas.

<sup>22</sup> Bethany A. Caruso and others, "Women, work and water," *The Lancet*, 21 March 2023.

<sup>23</sup> UN-Women, *Global Gendered Impacts of the Ukraine Crisis on Energy Access and Food Security and Nutrition*.

<sup>24</sup> WFP, *WFP Global Operational Response Plan: Update #7* (February 2023).

<sup>25</sup> WFP, *WFP Global Operational Response Plan: Update #5* (June 2022).

men.<sup>26</sup> In 2022, the number of food-insecure women assisted by the World Food Programme (WFP) nearly doubled.<sup>27</sup>

16. Discriminatory laws, policies and social norms continue to impede rural women's full and equal participation in the economy and society; women have only 77 per cent of the legal rights that men enjoy across 190 countries.<sup>28</sup> Less than 15 per cent of agricultural landholders globally are women, although this proportion varies widely across countries,<sup>29</sup> ranging from 6.6 per cent in Pakistan in 2018 to 57.8 per cent in Malawi in 2020.<sup>30</sup> A recent analysis conducted by FAO indicates that the percentage of men with ownership of or secure tenure rights to agricultural land is twice that of women in more than 30 per cent of 46 reporting countries, and a greater proportion of men than women have ownership or secure tenure rights in 40 of those countries. In addition, FAO found that, in general, the level of legal protection for women's land rights is low in 34 of 68 reporting countries.<sup>31</sup>

17. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, although 164 of 180 countries analysed in a study explicitly recognize women's rights to own, use and make decisions about land on equal terms with men, only 29 per cent of those countries guarantee those rights in law and practice. Women face restrictions with regard to claiming and protecting land assets because of customary, religious or traditional laws and practices in 62 per cent of the countries, and they do not have the same legal rights as men to own, use or control land in the other 9 per cent.<sup>32</sup> Around the world, 43 economies still do not grant equal inheritance rights to surviving men and women spouses. As a result, widows are often dispossessed of property and left destitute upon the death of a spouse. Moreover, daughters lack the same inheritance rights as sons in 42 countries.<sup>33</sup>

18. Gender parity in education was close to being achieved before the unforeseen impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and school closures. Gender gaps in education remain significant in some regions (sub-Saharan Africa) and progress in that regard has been reversed in some countries (Afghanistan).<sup>34</sup> Women and girls from the poorest households and in rural areas have been left behind. Less than 1 per cent of poor rural women finished secondary education in a sample of 20 countries.<sup>35</sup> The gap in upper secondary school completion rates between the poorest rural girls and the richest urban girls ranges from 11.5 per cent to 72.2 per cent in 29 countries for which recent data are available. Persistent poverty, the increasing responsibilities of unpaid care and domestic work and the lack of improved household drinking water and electricity are among the barriers preventing rural girls from completing primary and secondary school.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>26</sup> FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022* (Rome, 2022); and FAO, *The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems* (Rome, 2023).

<sup>27</sup> Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance, *Brief No. 3, Global impact of war in Ukraine: Energy Crisis* (August 2022).

<sup>28</sup> World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law 2023* (Washington, D.C., 2023).

<sup>29</sup> FAO, *The Gender Gap in Land Rights* (Rome, 2018).

<sup>30</sup> FAO, *The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Social Institutions and Gender Index, 2019 Global Report: Transforming Challenges into Opportunities* (Paris, 2019). See also [E/2022/55](#).

<sup>33</sup> World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law 2022* (Washington, D.C., 2022).

<sup>34</sup> UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2022: Gender Report, Deepening the Debate on Those Still Left Behind* (Paris, 2022); and UNESCO, *When Schools Shut: Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 School Closures* (Paris, 2021).

<sup>35</sup> FAO, *The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems*.

<sup>36</sup> UN-Women, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2022* (New York, 2022).

19. The gender digital divide in rural areas persists against a backdrop of crisis, and there is mixed evidence regarding progress in rural women's financial inclusion. The gender gap in bank account ownership, which had remained steady at 9 per cent since 2011, dropped to 6 per cent in 2021, although account ownership in developing countries tends to be lower in rural areas, where most unbanked adults are women.<sup>37</sup>

20. Mobile phones enable rural women to access online banking, agricultural extension and other services. In 2022, the gender gap in mobile phone ownership was greatest at 15 per cent in South Asia and 13 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, compared with 26 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively, in 2017. Women with low literacy levels, low incomes, who are unemployed, older than 55, with disabilities or live in rural areas are even less likely to own a mobile phone. For mobile Internet use, the gender gap is greatest at 41 per cent in South Asia, a significant decline from 65 per cent in 2017, and 36 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa, a slight increase from 35 per cent in 2017. Women, in particular in rural areas and the less educated, were more likely than men to have reduced mobile Internet use in 2022 as a consequence of the cost-of-living crisis.<sup>38</sup>

21. As it becomes increasingly clear that the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is at risk, progress on most targets has been set back as a result of crises.<sup>39</sup> The diversity of rural women and girls and the challenges they face merit tailored policy and programmatic responses to enhance their livelihoods, well-being and resilience to present and future crises. Examples of such approaches will be discussed in the sections that follow.

### **III. Enhancing the livelihoods, well-being and resilience of women and girls in rural areas**

#### **A. Investing in and strengthening the economic empowerment of rural women**

22. Member States have set forth specific plans and strategies to promote rural women's economic empowerment and have reported on initiatives to bolster the economic empowerment of rural women and girls and their communities through support for sustainable livelihoods, rural women's enterprises and cooperatives and rural women's financial and digital inclusion.

23. Countries have targeted rural women and girls in their national plans and strategies. In Argentina, the Sembrar Igualdad (Sowing Equality) programme is a principal component of the national plan for equality in diversity (2021–2023). The programme's objective is to ensure the full development of women and LGBTI+ persons in rural areas by reducing inequalities in access to and control of economic, social and cultural resources, promoting economic autonomy and financial inclusion, and preventing and addressing gender-based violence.

24. One of the aims of the strategic plan that Cyprus adopted in 2022 within the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union is to improve rural livelihoods by boosting job opportunities, local development and gender equality, including the increased participation of women in agriculture.

<sup>37</sup> Asli Demirgüç-Kunt and others, *Global Findex Database 2021: Financial Inclusion, Digital Payments, and Resilience in the Age of COVID-19* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2022).

<sup>38</sup> Global System for Mobile Communications, *The Mobile Gender Gap Report* (London, 2023); and Global System for Mobile Communications, *Connected Women: The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2021* (London, 2021).

<sup>39</sup> United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023*.



25. The objectives of the National Agenda for Gender Equality (2021–2025) of Ecuador are to create employment and productive opportunities for rural women, formalize rural women’s informal work by providing social security coverage and support women’s financial inclusion through access to soft credit with long-term fixed interest rates.

26. Our Rural Future, the rural development policy of Ireland for the period 2021–2025, is premised, in part, on the idea that generational renewal of rural areas depends on the participation of young farmers and women. To that end, it is necessary to conduct research on the particular needs of women, girls, LGBTI+ persons, Travellers, Roma, migrants and those of migrant origin living in rural areas. The policy calls for supporting the engagement of women in farming through the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union, taxation measures and finance initiatives.

27. Member States have implemented programmes to promote young rural women’s economic empowerment, including their financial inclusion, and facilitate the education-to-work transition. In Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Spain, the Rural Action for Innovative and Sustainable Entrepreneurship for Youth project (2018–2023), funded by European Economic Area Grants and Norway Grants, has supported 4,000 persons (63 per cent women) who are not in employment, education or training and who reside in rural areas with depopulation, high unemployment rates and large Roma populations to attain education and training and self-employment in sustainable agribusiness. By April 2023, a total of 2,584 of persons who are not in employment, education or training were enrolled in education and training, including work-based learning, while another 523 had joined mentorship, apprenticeship or mobility schemes, 651 were self-employed and 136 had started their own businesses.

28. In Colombia, the financial inclusion strategy for rural women and youth of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development supports entrepreneurship, formalization and productive activities. Through the “My finances count” programme, a virtual education programme operated by the Ministry, rural women and youth can access valuable information and tools for managing their finances and strengthening their capacities and skills to make better decisions at home and at work. At the time of writing, 4,566 women and 1,503 young women and men between 18 and 28 years of age had benefited from the programme.

29. Other countries have focused on grant-making or microcredit programmes to support entrepreneurship and income-generating activities. In September 2022, Equatorial Guinea launched a project to support women’s initiatives in order to strengthen women’s economic and financial autonomy through income-generating activities in various areas, including agriculture and agribusiness, livestock and fishing, and management of natural resources.

30. In Nicaragua, the Microcredit Programme for Rural Entrepreneurs supported 34,977 women and generated 104,000 new jobs through women’s entrepreneurship and small businesses between 2017 and 2022.

31. In April 2023, Poland set aside 120 million zlotys in the State budget and invited the 12,500 registered Country Housewives’ Associations to apply for financial assistance for use in achieving their statutory objectives, which include integrated rural development, women’s entrepreneurship, improving rural women’s living and working conditions, and representation of rural women.

32. The National Rural Development Programme (2022–2024) of Serbia gives priority to women applicants seeking funding for rural development projects.

33. In Ukraine, the eRobota agrarian support programme provides grants to farmers to build greenhouses, purchase equipment and seeds, plant orchards and gardens for



horticulture, and develop viticulture and processing enterprises. Since July 2022, more than 7,000 women have applied for grants to develop their own businesses.

34. Member States have invested in the economic empowerment of rural and indigenous women and their communities. Since 2021, the Nuestras Manos (Our Hands) programme in Argentina has funded 182 projects for 2,707 peasant and indigenous women farmers and fishers to increase production, add value and improve marketing.

35. In 2022, Chile launched a set of 20 commitments, at the national and regional levels, that incorporate a gender perspective in support of artisanal fishing, with a view to reducing gender gaps in that sector through intersectoral coordination of public services.

36. The Women and Agriculture programme of El Salvador promotes the economic development of indigenous, rural and semi-urban women by providing training on gender equality, agriculture and agribusiness, and it helps them to establish home gardens and produce and process fruits and vegetables both for their own consumption and for sale.

37. In Guatemala, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare conducted training on and raised awareness of the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169), of the International Labour Organization, with an emphasis on labour rights, equal pay, non-discrimination at work, entrepreneurship, employability and the rights of Indigenous Peoples. In 2022, a total of 4,750 women benefited, 65 per cent of whom were from the Maya, Garifuna or Xinca peoples.

38. Since 2021, the Programme for the Integrated Well-being of Indigenous Peoples of Mexico has supported 32,615 indigenous or Afro-Mexican women to implement productive projects and improved financial inclusion, access to markets, marketing strategies and presentation of products and services for 7,581 women and provided training on participatory processes to manage and use resources to 15,146 women.

39. Countries are also strengthening women farmers' organizations and cooperatives. In 2021, Türkiye renewed for a period of two years an interministry cooperation protocol on strengthening women's cooperatives, in order to ensure their sustainability, improve their institutional capacity and increase their visibility. Training and consultancy services were provided on rural women's empowerment, cooperative management, production, product development, marketing and food safety.

40. The United Nations system supports the sustainable livelihoods and economic empowerment of rural women through different approaches, including digital inclusion. The International Telecommunication Union, in partnership with the Enhanced Integrated Framework and the United Nations Office for Project Services, is implementing the Enhancing the Digital Ecosystem and Digital Skills project for the economic empowerment of women in Burundi, Ethiopia and Haiti. The aim of the project is to build the digital skills of women in the least developed countries, increase access to markets, secure partnerships and negotiate business deals valued at more than \$2 million. In Burundi, the project is working with women farmers, cooperatives and associations in the coffee and tea value chain, providing training on basic digital skills and the use of mobile phones and information and communications technology for climate-resilient agricultural production and marketing.

41. In order to address gender inequalities in food systems and advance broad and sustainable improvements in rural women's livelihoods, rights and resilience at household, community and institutional levels, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, International Fund for Agricultural Development, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of

Women (UN-Women) and WFP, supported by Norway, Sweden and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, are implementing the second phase of the Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards Rural Women’s Economic Empowerment (2022–2027) in Nepal, the Niger, Rwanda, Tunisia and the United Republic of Tanzania, as well as in the Pacific Islands. The programme is aimed at achieving four interrelated outcomes: (a) equitable and sustainable food systems with improved food security and nutrition; (b) increased income, decent work and economic autonomy to secure livelihoods and build resilience; (c) rural women’s increased voice, agency and full and equal participation and leadership in households, communities and organizations; and (d) more gender-responsive legal frameworks, policies and institutions. Building on the learnings from the first phase, the second phase includes two cross-cutting perspectives: (a) gender-transformative approaches, including engaging with men and boys, to promote social norm change; and (b) social, economic, climate and environmental resilience across interventions to enhance rural women’s ability to mitigate and adapt to shocks.

## **B. Improving rural women’s access to and control of land, water and other natural resources**

42. Member States have supported gender-responsive law and policy change and programming that promotes both rural and indigenous women’s land rights and access to and control of land, water and other natural resources and their participation and influence in the sustainable management and use of these resources.

43. Member States have enacted legislation in favour of women’s land and inheritance rights. In 2022, Sierra Leone passed the Customary Land Rights Act, which protects customary land rights, eliminates discrimination under customary law and guarantees women’s equal rights and access to land. It prohibits industrial development in protected, conserved or ecologically sensitive areas by establishing guidelines for investor-induced displacement and resettlement that require investors to obtain the free, prior and informed consent of adult men and women members of affected communities in case such investment affects customary lands.<sup>40</sup>

44. Uganda enacted the Succession (Amendment) Act in 2022. The Act, which incorporates gender-neutral language, specifically removes the provision favouring male heirs over female heirs and grants equal inheritance rights to sons and daughters and male and female surviving spouses. This comprehensive reform by Uganda of its inheritance laws is the first such reform that has occurred in sub-Saharan Africa since Mali made inheritance rights equal for men and women in 2011.<sup>41</sup>

45. Member States and United Nations agencies are supporting women’s rights and access to and sustainable management of land and resources, including forests, fisheries and water. The Native Forest Producers Programme (2022–2023) of Argentina is aimed at reducing gender gaps in native forest communities by supporting women’s sustainable forest management through the provision of \$4 million to finance at least 40 projects.

46. In 2022, Nicaragua implemented 18 rural water and sanitation projects, directly benefiting 16,290 women by providing them with access to water resources and promoting women’s awareness and leadership at different stages of the project cycle.

<sup>40</sup> World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law 2023*; and “The Customary Land Rights Act, 2022 (Sierra Leone)”, available at <https://namati.org/resources/customary-land-rights-act-2022-sierra-leone/>.

<sup>41</sup> World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law 2023*.

47. In Uruguay, the National Gender Plan for Agricultural and Livestock Policies (2021–2024) mainstreams gender in State institutions with the objective of reducing gender inequalities in access to resources in rural areas and in the agricultural, livestock and fisheries sector.

48. FAO is raising awareness of rural communities on women’s land rights through Talking Books, an innovative pilot project in Uganda that enables remote, underserved rural populations with low or no literacy and limited access to electricity and the Internet to receive training and share stories and ideas on women’s land rights and their benefits for households and communities.

49. The United Nations Development Programme supported women’s leadership in 96 countries in 2022, including through quotas for women in local land and water management committees, in order to protect and better manage ecosystems and biodiversity.

50. The Stand for Her Land Campaign is aimed improving implementation of the laws and policies that protect and uphold women’s land rights, with a view to the realization of those rights in practice. Supported by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany and the Office of Global Women’s Issues of the Secretary of State of the United States of America, national coalitions in Bangladesh, Colombia, Ethiopia, Senegal, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania advocate with governments and development partners for reform and implementation of equitable laws, policies, and regulations with regard to women’s land rights.<sup>42</sup>

### C. Ensuring the food security and nutrition of rural women and girls

51. Rural women were especially affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to contain it, including, in particular, reduced access to nutritious food as a result of diminished capacities for food production and distribution and declines in purchasing power.<sup>43</sup> In response to the acute decline in food security and nutrition brought on by the COVID-19 and cost-of-living crises, Member States have taken steps to address those challenges, including through the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and traditional crops for present and future generations.

52. In Mexico, the Sembrando Vida (Sowing Life) programme promotes food self-sufficiency through agroforestry production systems, addressing both rural poverty and environmental degradation. Under the project, women, who comprise one third of its 500,000 participants, work 2.5 hectares of land. As at the end of 2022, production units yielded an average 52,000 Mexican pesos, or more than \$3,000, per year.

53. In Mauritania, the Promotion of Gender-Sensitive Agricultural Value Chains to Support the Agricultural Transformation Support Programme (2022–2025), which is financed by the African Development Bank, will improve the food security and nutrition and economic autonomy of 12,500 producers in 120 women’s cooperatives through irrigation infrastructure for women’s market gardens that harnesses renewable energy, promotion of value chains and women’s entrepreneurship, and a microfinance mechanism, including an agricultural guarantee and insurance fund.

54. To increase the resilience of rural women and girls and Indigenous Peoples in Nicaragua, the Sustainable Development of the Livelihoods of Rural Families in the Dry Corridor of Nicaragua Project promotes the links between economic

<sup>42</sup> See <https://stand4herland.org/about-the-campaign/>.

<sup>43</sup> United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023*.

diversification, productive transformation, environmental protection, natural resource management and small farmer families' access to nutritious food and an adequate diet. At the time of writing, 25,239 families were participating in the project. Of that number, 15,670 are headed by women, 73 per cent of whom are indigenous women. The goal of the project is to reach a total of 30,000 families.

55. In Panama, the “Seed stewards: Women for food security” project of the Ministry of Women supports community or home gardens to improve the food security and nutrition of rural women, girls and boys in situations of vulnerability.

56. Senegal is implementing the National Strategy for Food Security and Resilience (2015–2035), the aim of which is to ensure that those who are most vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity (women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities) have easy and sustainable access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food and attain strong resilience capacities by 2035.

57. In Togo, the implementation of the National Programme for Agricultural Investment and Food Security (2017–2026) is guided by the principles of social equity, gender equality and reduction of regional disparities. Accordingly, the country's agricultural policy requires that at least 30 per cent of working staff are women and that at least 40 of those who benefit from the impact of investment projects are women.

58. To support food security and nutrition, Zimbabwe has rolled out the AGRIC4SHE horticulture recovery plan and initiative in order to encourage people to grow and consume traditional foods, thereby promoting women's participation in agriculture, horticulture and sustainable management of resources and increasing the production and consumption of healthy, nutritious food.

59. WFP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund coordinated the Breaking Barriers to Girls' Education initiative in Chad and the Niger (2019–2022). The initiative was targeted at 130,000 adolescent girls with a view to ensuring that they are healthy and well-nourished while in school and bolstering their opportunities to learn and thrive. An integrated package of support covered improved access to adequate and nutritious food, nutrition, health care and sexual and reproductive health services, as well as prevention of gender-based violence.

60. In 2019, the Committee on World Food Security, at its forty-sixth session, endorsed a policy process for the development of voluntary guidelines on gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in the context of food security and nutrition. These voluntary guidelines are to be introduced for adoption at the Committee's fifty-first session in October 2023. The voluntary guidelines provide guidance to governments and other stakeholders on policies, investments and institutional arrangements to eradicate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in the context of the progressive realization of the right to adequate food from a gender perspective.

#### **D. Improving social protection for rural women and girls**

61. Member States have reported on the measures that they have taken to increase social protection for rural women and girls, including access to basic social, health and care services. Those measures notwithstanding, this is an area that warrants much greater attention, as amply demonstrated by the shortfalls in social protection that were exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

62. In Australia, grants provided by the Community Child Care Fund continue to facilitate access to early childhood education and care, in particular for children and

families in disadvantaged, rural and remote areas and Indigenous communities. The National Women's Health Strategy (2020–2030) gives priority to women and girls from rural and remote areas, who face greater health risks and poorer access to health care, including reproductive health services.

63. The Solidarity Network in Honduras continues to improve living conditions and access to social protection for households living in poverty and extreme poverty in rural and urban areas. At the time of writing, it had facilitated the establishment of over 1,200 solidarity groups led by women and granted 138,267 conditional cash transfers to women heads of household.

64. Ireland provides maternity leave payments for 26 weeks to eligible employed and self-employed women, who can apply online for this benefit. Women from rural households are also eligible for this benefit.

65. In Panama, the Ministry of Women operates 16 comprehensive care centres that are designed to offer services to women throughout the country, including in provincial and indigenous areas.

66. In Senegal, support provided by UN-Women to the country's National Agency for Universal Health Coverage helped the Agency adapt its services to meet the needs of rural women and facilitate their access to social protection, with a view to better redistributing their care work and addressing risk of income loss. This support was provided in the context of the project entitled "Transformative approaches for recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care work in women's economic empowerment", which is funded by Global Affairs Canada. In 2022–2023, a total of 1,300 rural women signed up for health insurance for the first time, for themselves and their households, covering nearly 7,000 people in vulnerable situations.

67. In 2023, Uruguay updated its guidelines for action in situations of gender-based and generational violence against women, children and adolescents in rural areas. In 2022, the country designed and implemented a 30-hour course for women extension agents in rural areas on the right to a life free of gender-based violence.

## **E. Ensuring the full and equal participation of rural women and girls in decision-making**

68. Member States are taking steps towards the full and equal participation of rural women and girls in decision-making by supporting the leadership of women, including young women, in rural areas and facilitating spaces for dialogue on issues that affect their lives, livelihoods and well-being.

69. Australia supports the National Rural Women's Coalition, which advocates for women living in rural, regional and remote areas and engages with networks across the country to determine priority issues and collect evidence and data that will inform policy. The Coalition provides key policy advice to the government on matters affecting rural women.

70. In Ireland, the LEADER programme for rural development (2023–2027) is administered by local action groups that comprise representatives from the community and the public and private sectors. These local action groups are responsible for selecting and awarding LEADER funding to projects in their respective areas. The particular aim of the programme is to promote the participation of women in the socioeconomic development of rural areas and participation of women in the decision-making bodies of the local action groups.

71. In Mexico, projects for the implementation and effective exercise of fundamental rights at the community and regional levels have strengthened

indigenous women's participation in decision-making within their communities and in their organizations by facilitating alliances with women's organizations and local authorities.

72. In Panama, the Ministry of Women's Affairs convenes the National Meeting of Rural Women with the aim of strengthening the capacities of rural women leaders who represent peasant, indigenous and Afrodescendant women's groups.

73. Uruguay convenes dialogues for rural women under its agenda for the rights of rural women. At those dialogues, representatives of civil society organizations and public institutions identify the main needs and problems of rural women and discuss proposals to overcome them. In addition, Uruguay sponsors courses for young rural women aged 18 to 29 who are involved in agricultural and livestock activity, whether on their own or with their families. These courses address sustainable rural development from an intersectional gender perspective and the role of young women in participation and advocacy, with the aim of fostering the leadership skills and empowering a network of young rural women across the country.

## **F. Strengthening the collection, analysis and dissemination of sex- and age-disaggregated data and gender statistics**

74. Member States have filled some significant gaps in the data and statistics available on rural women and girls. In addition, countries are continuing to collect time-use data that will help to assess the disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work performed by rural women and girls, among other issues.

75. Countries are conducting research in order to better understand the social, demographic economic and environmental situation of rural women. In 2021, Algeria conducted a study in 22 of its 48 provinces on the socioeconomic situation of rural women engaged in agriculture through a quantitative questionnaire administered to 2,000 women. In 2023, the study will be complemented with qualitative information collected from focus groups in four pilot provinces.

76. The Rural Change Programme of Argentina has been tracking the participation of producers in rural areas by gender. In 2022, a total of 25.4 per cent of all rural workers were women, an increase of almost 7 per cent since 2017, when this criterion was first measured.

77. In Mongolia, where approximately 30 per cent of the population are nomads, the National Statistics Office, with support from the Women Count programme of UN-Women, conducted a survey that yielded new and important statistical insights into the lives of nomadic women herders. The gender data collected capture the specific needs of Mongolian women herders and the challenges that they face because of climate and environmental factors.

78. Mexico will once again conduct the National Survey of Occupation and Employment in 2023. This survey will collect information on the economically active population in rural areas and at the national level, with the data disaggregated by sex.

79. Serbia is planning to conduct an agricultural census in 2023 that will enable it to disaggregate data by sex.

80. In Uruguay, data collected through the Continuous Household Survey of 2021 show that, in localities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants and in dispersed rural areas, women have lower economic activity and employment rates than men. In those localities and areas, 17 per cent of women are engaged in household chores. By contrast, 12.5 per cent of women living in localities with more than 5,000 inhabitants

and 8.5 per cent of women residing in Montevideo, the capital, are engaged in household chores.

81. Countries are conducting or planning to conduct time-use surveys in order to improve understanding of, inter alia, the time that rural women and men spend on unpaid care and domestic work, identify gender gaps and make policy recommendations. Armenia, with support from the Women Count programme of UN-Women, launched its first time-use survey in 2022, and Cameroon included a time-use module in its fifth national household survey, which was launched in October 2021.<sup>44</sup>

82. Australia has conducted four time-use surveys since 1992. Starting in 2024, these surveys will be conducted on an annual basis. The aim of these surveys is to collect data, disaggregated by gender, on the time that people spend on daily activities, including unpaid care and domestic work, in the country's major cities and in regional and remote areas.

83. Belarus will conduct a time-use survey in 2024/25. The data gathered will be used to update information on paid and unpaid work disaggregated by sex and urban or rural area that was compiled in the previous survey, which was conducted in 2014/15. In 2021, Belarus developed its Gender Statistics Web Portal with support from UN-Women and UNICEF. This portal contains data organized under 177 gender-related statistical indicators, which are disaggregated by urban or rural area from the year 2000.

84. In 2023, Chile will conduct a pilot time-use survey in rural areas in order to provide information, disaggregated by gender, on all forms of work carried out by persons aged 12 and above, highlighting the contribution made to the economy through domestic work.

85. Colombia, drawing on the national time-use survey that it conducted in 2020/21, is carrying out a study on the time-use of rural youth between 14 and 28 years of age, with a view to analysing the time spent on unpaid care and domestic work, disaggregated by sex.

86. In addition, Member States are focusing on understanding the experiences of rural and urban women in relation to specific issues, such as gender-based violence. In August 2022, Turkmenistan released its first national sample survey on the health and status of women in the family. The survey, which covered 3,596 households, showed a slight difference between urban and rural areas with regard to the prevalence of intimate partner violence (10.7 per cent in rural areas versus 12 per cent in urban areas), but a greater difference in the proportion of the victims of domestic violence who speak out about it (54.4 per cent in urban areas versus 23.8 per cent in rural areas). Only 11.9 per cent of victims sought help, with rural women doing so less frequently than urban women.

### III. Conclusions and recommendations

87. Member States have made policy and programmatic efforts to improve the situation of women and girls in rural areas despite the repercussions of successive crises that have compounded rural poverty, exclusion and food insecurity and entrenched gender inequalities. Member States submissions demonstrate a great commitment to further promoting rural women's economic empowerment, both through strategic frameworks and plans and on-the-ground initiatives covering

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<sup>44</sup> UN-Women, *Final Annual Report. Making Every Woman and Girl Count: Moving the Needle on Gender Data* (New York, 2022).



sustainable livelihoods and agricultural production, decent work, entrepreneurship and financial and digital inclusion. Member States are supporting rural women's participation and leadership in decision-making and policymaking and in local resource governance to a certain extent. That support notwithstanding, efforts that show promise should be multiplied and scaled up for widespread and lasting change.

88. Gender data and statistics specifically on rural women and girls merit greater attention. As national statistical offices resume work in the aftermath of pandemic shutdowns, the production, analysis, use and dissemination of sex- and age-disaggregated data and gender statistics remain piecemeal at best. Countries are showing renewed interest in conducting time-use surveys and agricultural censuses; however, increased support and investment are needed to obtain sufficient quantitative and qualitative information on rural women and girls to inform policies and action towards substantive improvements.

89. Reflecting the submissions made by Member States, renewed and intensive efforts are needed to enact, fund and implement economic and social policies to improve rural women's and girls' plummeting food security and nutrition and woefully inadequate social protection coverage, as well as to rein in escalating unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities and build climate and environmental resilience, with a view to weathering the disproportionate consequences of crises on rural women and girls during the reporting period. Systematic attention should be focused on ensuing rural women's and girls' access to land, water and other natural resources through policy reform and advocacy at all levels. Few countries reported on social protection, and little mention was made of the services and infrastructure, especially water, sanitation and energy, needed to reduce and redistribute rural women's and girls' unpaid care and domestic work. As food insecurity rises to alarming levels globally, determined and targeted efforts are required to end rural women's and girls' disproportionate levels of hunger and malnutrition. Rural development policies and programmes must be transformed to meet global climate, environmental and financial challenges and build the resilience of rural women and girls to withstand current and future crises.

90. Member States are encouraged to implement the following recommendations, presented for consideration by the General Assembly, to improve the situation of women and girls in rural areas:

(a) **Take action to implement existing commitments relating to gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls in all their diversity and the realization of their rights, in particular the commitments that are set out in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, taking note of general recommendations No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women and No. 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas; the General Assembly resolution on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment; the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as an integrated and universal framework that leaves no rural women or girls behind;**

(b) **Design, develop and implement gender-responsive and integrated sustainable development and agricultural and rural development policies and programmes that respond to the needs and priorities of rural women and girls;**

(c) **Promote the full and equal participation and decision-making at all levels of rural women and girls, including women farmers, fishers and agricultural workers, in sustainable agricultural and rural development**

strategies, policies and programmes, and environmental, climate and natural resource governance;

(d) Take decisive action to eliminate the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and violence facing rural women and girls by addressing structural barriers and discriminatory social norms;

(e) Promote rural women's economic empowerment by realizing their right to work and rights at work, building their capacities and skills to manage enterprises and cooperatives, facilitating formalization and ensuring their financial and digital inclusion;

(f) Enact and implement policies to eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities by promoting sustainable livelihoods, decent work and income security in rural areas in order to enhance the well-being and resilience of rural women and girls;

(g) Promote the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of food security and nutrition for rural women and girls in all their diversity;

(h) Recognize, reduce and redistribute rural women's and girls' unpaid care and domestic work and promote rural women's decent paid care work by investing in gender-responsive public services and health and care systems, universal social protection, sustainable transport and infrastructure, and time- and labour-saving technologies, including sustainable energy, safe drinking water, sanitation and information and communications technologies in rural areas;

(i) Develop and adopt gender-responsive strategies to support the resilience and adaptive capacities of rural women and girls to respond to the adverse impacts of climate change and recover from economic, social, environmental and health shocks and crises;

(j) Build the resilience of rural women smallholder and subsistence farmers to climate change and environmental degradation by recognizing ancestral, indigenous and modern technological practices and knowledge, including agroecology, and by strengthening access to markets, extension and financial services, climate risk insurance and information, in order to enable them to engage in climate-resilient agriculture and sustainable natural resource management;

(k) Value and support the critical role and contribution of rural women, including Indigenous women, in the conservation and sustainable use of traditional crops and biodiversity for present and future generations as an essential contribution to food security and nutrition;

(l) Design, reform and implement laws and policies to realize rural women's full and equal rights to, access to, control over and ownership of land, water and other natural resources, and also to tenure security and equal inheritance;

(m) Support rural young women's and girls' participation, leadership and ability to complete education and training, and young women's participation in the labour market on equal terms with young men;

(n) Invest in gender-responsive universal social protection systems, including floors, that ensure the income security of rural women and girls over their life course and cover rural women in informal employment;

(o) **Ensure the provision and affordability of health-care services for rural women and girls through universal health coverage that includes access to sexual and reproductive health services and rights over their life course;**

(p) **Support social, economic, political and scientific institutions to take into account the gender-differentiated effects of biodiversity loss, climate change and environmental degradation on rural women and girls, and to develop robust, gender-responsive evidence, tools, databases, methodologies and policy analyses to respond to and mitigate these effects;**

(q) **Increase the capacity of national statistical offices and other relevant institutions to collect, analyse and disseminate data disaggregated by sex, age and other characteristics and produce gender statistics to support policies and action to improve the situation of rural women and girls and monitor and track implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.**

91. **The United Nations system and other international organizations are encouraged to support Member States to implement, measure and monitor the foregoing recommendations at all levels.**

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