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**Eradication of poverty and other development issues**

### **Eradicating rural poverty to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

#### **Report of the Secretary-General**

#### *Summary*

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [77/183](#) and contains an examination of the current state of rural poverty and the numerous gaps and challenges to its eradication, especially in developing countries. Policy recommendations to overcome those gaps and challenges are suggested.

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



## I. Introduction

1. The world is not on track to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 1 on ending poverty in all its forms. Without faster and sustained progress in addressing rural poverty and other deprivations affecting rural populations, it will not be possible to meet most of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Urgent action is needed to reverse the tide and accelerate progress, especially in rural areas.

2. Even before the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the pace of rural poverty reduction had slowed after more than two decades of sustained progress. The pandemic resulted in massive job and income losses that most severely affected populations in socially and economically vulnerable situations, especially women and children, young people, the poorest households and those in the informal economy.

3. The slow and uneven recovery from the pandemic, along with price volatility in international commodity markets, the persistence of conflict and the increasing frequency of extreme weather events, often aggravated by climate change, have brought the pace of rural poverty reduction almost to a halt. Widening inequalities further jeopardize progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>1</sup>

4. The present report examines the status of progress in reducing rural poverty globally, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution [77/183](#). It analyses the economic, social and environmental dimensions of monetary and multidimensional rural poverty, highlighting persistent gaps and proposing actions geared towards implementing the report of the Secretary-General entitled “Our Common Agenda” and the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals.

5. Because the Goals will not be achieved without inclusive, environmentally sustainable rural development, it is critical to put the eradication of rural poverty at the centre of an ambitious agenda to transform agrifood systems, increase agricultural productivity, facilitate transitions into non-agricultural employment, promote inclusive climate action and improve rural livelihoods, focusing first on those left furthest behind.

## II. State of rural poverty: progress achieved and pressing challenges

6. Between 1990 and 2014, the world experienced impressive progress in reducing extreme poverty. The decline in poverty was largely driven by China, owing to a massive shift of workers from low-productivity agriculture to industry and services.<sup>2</sup> By 2015, the pace of global poverty reduction had slowed before receiving a sharp setback in 2020. As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, 71 million more people were living in extreme poverty in 2020 compared with 2019.<sup>3</sup>

7. According to the most recent estimates, 659 million people, or about 8 per cent of the global population, live in extreme poverty.<sup>4</sup> In terms of regional distribution,

<sup>1</sup> See [A/77/209](#).

<sup>2</sup> World Bank, *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2022: Correcting Course* (Washington, D.C., 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Marta Schoch and others, “To end extreme poverty, getting back to pre-COVID-19 reduction rates is not enough”, World Bank Blogs, 30 November 2022.

<sup>4</sup> This is based on a poverty line of less than \$2.15 per day in 2017 purchasing power parity. See S. Baah and others, “March 2023 global poverty update from the World Bank: the challenge of estimating poverty in the pandemic”, World Bank, 29 March 2023.

sub-Saharan Africa is now home to 60 per cent of the world's extreme poor, up from 13 per cent in 1990. South Asia accounts for another 24 per cent.<sup>5</sup>

8. Poverty continues to be overwhelmingly rural and is primarily concentrated in the agricultural sector. Over 80 per cent of the world's extreme poor live in rural areas, where about 45 per cent of residents are either extremely or moderately poor, compared with 16 per cent of urban residents. In absolute numbers, this represents more than 1.3 billion people who, despite the role they play in global food production, cannot afford the cost of food and other basic necessities.<sup>6</sup>

9. Most of the rural poor are small-scale producers and agricultural workers, including fisherfolk, pastoralists and forest-dependent people. Nearly two thirds are engaged in agriculture, where extreme poverty rates are more than four times higher than among non-agricultural workers (20 vs. 5 per cent).<sup>7</sup> Because their well-being is inextricably linked to the natural resources upon which they depend, environmental hazards and climate stresses expose the rural poor to greater risk of livelihood shocks and render them highly vulnerable to cycles of asset depletion, indebtedness and deprivation.

10. Rural areas also host a disproportionate share of people living in multidimensional poverty. Comparable data from 110 countries, home to 6.1 billion people, reveal that 1.1 billion were multidimensionally poor in 2023, of whom nearly 84 per cent resided in areas classified as rural. In every country, both the incidence and the intensity of multidimensional poverty are higher in rural than in urban areas. Sub-Saharan Africa (534 million), followed by South Asia (389 million), account for the highest number of multidimensionally poor people.<sup>8</sup>

11. The increasing concentration of poverty in rural areas predated the outbreak of COVID-19.<sup>9</sup> By curtailing farm and non-farm activities, reducing access to local markets and affecting incomes and food security, the pandemic worsened the already vulnerable position of the rural poor, many of whom depend on mobility, seasonal and migrant work and remittances.<sup>10</sup> Since then, a combination of multiple crises has continued to slow progress in poverty reduction, especially in low-income countries, where agricultural employment represents more than half of the labour force.<sup>11</sup>

12. Price volatility in key commodity markets and the slow and uneven recovery following the COVID-19 crisis are impacting economic growth and dimming the prospects for turning the tide on rising poverty, hunger and inequality. Although the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Food Price Index has trended downward since reaching an all-time high in March 2022, it remains at

<sup>5</sup> World Bank, *Global Economic Prospects* (Washington, D.C., 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Andrés Castañeda and others, "A new profile of the global poor", *World Development*, vol. 101 (January 2018); and World Bank, *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2022*. These figures may underestimate the actual number of poor people in rural areas, owing to the omission of over one quarter of the population of sub-Saharan Africa because of limited availability of household survey data.

<sup>7</sup> Andrés Castañeda and others, "A new profile of the global poor".

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023. Unstacking global poverty: Data for high impact action* (2023).

<sup>9</sup> World Bank, *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020: Reversals of Fortune* (Washington, D.C., 2020).

<sup>10</sup> *World Social Report 2021: Reconsidering Rural Development* (United Nations publication, 2021); and Carolina Sánchez-Páramo, "The new poor are different: Who they are and why it matters", World Bank Blogs, 13 August 2020.

<sup>11</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), "Advancing social justice and decent work in rural economies", ILO Brief (October 2022).

historically high levels.<sup>12</sup> The price of fuel and fertilizers has also increased, pushing up the production and distribution costs of agricultural products and triggering strong inflationary pressures across the world. This not only squeezed household budgets already depleted by two years of pandemic-induced job and income losses, but also took place at a time when countries, still reeling from the effects of COVID-19, have had limited fiscal space to respond.

13. The threat of a cost-of-living crisis<sup>13</sup> is exacerbated by persistent violence and fragility in many parts of the world and by the greater intensity, frequency and duration of adverse weather events that disrupt farming and livelihoods, increasing poverty and hunger in regions with large numbers of subsistence producers who lack the resources to absorb and cope with multiple concurrent shocks.<sup>14</sup>

14. A large share of those affected by these interlocking crises are Indigenous Peoples, ethnic minorities, migrants, internally displaced persons, landless farmers and people living in remote rural areas who, together, represent a substantial share of those living in chronic poverty. About 80 per cent of people displaced by conflict live in countries with high levels of acute food insecurity and malnutrition.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, children younger than 18 years of age make up over 52 per cent of the world's extreme poor; in rural areas, many are exposed to a high incidence of child labour and forced labour in agriculture or fishing.<sup>16</sup>

15. About 70 per cent of the world's rural population live in low-income or lower-middle-income countries, where they comprise approximately two thirds of the total population.<sup>17</sup> Achieving the ambitious objective of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind calls for reaching the poorest, which largely means reaching the rural poor. Aspirations must be set high so that policies, investments and budgets are designed and implemented with that goal in mind.

### III. Major challenges in eradicating rural poverty

16. Gaps and disparities across multiple dimensions of development continue to hinder progress in reducing rural poverty while reproducing spatial inequalities that endanger social cohesion. A transformative development strategy that is inclusive, multi-sectoral and integrated is needed to mitigate the negative impacts of multiple concurrent shocks and to address long-standing and intergenerational deprivations that affect people living in rural areas around the world.

#### A. Data

17. Tracking global progress in rural poverty reduction is hampered by the lack of standardized measures for cross-country comparisons. Rural areas are highly diverse, and no universal definition of "rurality" exists: official definitions of rural and urban

<sup>12</sup> FAO, "World food situation", available at <https://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/>; and Agricultural Market Information System, "Market monitor", No. 109 (June 2023).

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance, "Global impact of the war in Ukraine: Billions of people face the greatest cost-of-living crisis in a generation", Brief No. 2, 8 June 2022; and UNDP, "Addressing the cost-of-living crisis in developing countries: poverty and vulnerability projections and policy responses" (New York, 2022).

<sup>14</sup> World Bank, *Global Economic Prospects*.

<sup>15</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM) and World Food Programme (WFP), *Populations at risk: Implications of COVID-19 for hunger, migration and displacement* (November 2020).

<sup>16</sup> Castañeda and others, "A new profile of the global poor"; and ILO, "Advancing social justice and decent work".

<sup>17</sup> *World Social Report 2021*.

differ by country, informed mostly by population size and density or determined on the basis of fixed administrative boundaries. Differences in methods and survey questionnaire design further limit the comparability of poverty estimates, not only between countries, but also within countries, over time.<sup>18</sup>

18. National household surveys are not available or collected regularly in all countries. Survey data collection is most challenging in countries impacted by conflict and fragility, where poverty is becoming increasingly concentrated.<sup>19</sup> Even where surveys are available, they often lack spatial granularity and therefore fail to capture rural heterogeneity in agricultural systems and livelihoods.

19. Collecting information on certain population groups, such as Indigenous Peoples, nomadic pastoralists, migrants, internally displaced persons or people living in remote and sparsely populated areas, poses additional challenges. Official statistics often undercount them, even though they are among the world's poorest.

20. Because rural people tend to hold multiple jobs, many of which are seasonal or intermittent, data collection and aggregation efforts that define employment only by the main labour activity tend to undercount the extent to which people in rural areas depend on agrifood systems for their livelihoods. Efforts are currently underway to produce data on the labour participation of men and women in agrifood systems and their subsectors.<sup>20,21</sup>

21. Despite challenges, important progress has been made in capturing the non-monetary dimensions of rural poverty, which has shed light on the specificities of rural poverty and on the types of deprivations that mostly affect rural communities.<sup>22</sup> Other critical innovations that have enhanced the collection of data on rural poverty include the increasing use of telephone surveys and high-resolution data facilitated by remote sensing. The use of machine learning techniques is increasing the ability to predict poverty and to design interventions at lower territorial levels.<sup>23</sup>

## B. Climate change

22. Rural areas contain most of the planet's biodiversity, which is currently being depleted and degraded. As the world experiences an increasing number of costly, record-breaking weather events linked to climate change, it may be approaching tipping points, whereby changes become self-perpetuating and accelerate in damaging ways.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *World Social Report 2021*; and Castañeda and others, "A new profile of the global poor".

<sup>19</sup> Paul Corral and others, *Fragility and Conflict: On the Front Lines of the Fight against Poverty* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2020).

<sup>20</sup> FAO, *Estimating Global and Country-level Employment in Agrifood Systems*, FAO Statistics Working Paper Series, Issue 23/34 (Rome, 2023).

<sup>21</sup> FAO, "The status of women in agrifood systems" (Rome, 2023).

<sup>22</sup> FAO and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, *Measuring Rural Poverty with a Multidimensional Approach: The Rural Multidimensional Poverty Index*, FAO Statistical Development Series, No. 19 (Rome, 2022); UNDP and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023*; and Corral, *Fragility and Conflict*. See also "50 x 2030", a multi-partner initiative that seeks to bridge the global agricultural data gap by transforming country data systems in 50 countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America by 2030 (<https://www.50x2030.org/>).

<sup>23</sup> Martin Hofer and others, "Applying artificial intelligence on satellite imagery to compile granular poverty statistics", Asian Development Bank, No. 629 (Philippines, December 2020); and Emily Aiken and others, "Machine learning and mobile phone data can improve the targeting of humanitarian assistance", National Bureau of Economic Research (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2021).

<sup>24</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Cambridge, United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 2022).

23. Climate change hampers agricultural yields, increases prices and worsens food insecurity in regions where small-scale producers lack the resources to adjust easily. If unchecked, the greater intensity, frequency and duration of adverse weather events will disrupt agriculture and livelihoods. This could push an additional 130 million people into poverty over the next 10 years and cause over 200 million people to migrate within their own countries by 2050.<sup>25,26</sup>

24. Rural populations living in poverty contribute the least to climate change but are the most at risk of welfare losses owing to rising global temperatures and extreme weather events. They also have the fewest resources and the least capacity to adapt to climate change, with women and young people facing additional challenges owing to structural barriers that further limit their access to resources, markets, services, technologies and institutional support. In the long term, climate change will not only lower productivity and worsen global poverty, but may also render some rural areas uninhabitable.<sup>27</sup>

25. Despite their key role in agrifood systems, small-scale producers receive only 1.7 per cent of global climate financing, with most funding devoted to climate mitigation rather than adaptation efforts.<sup>28</sup> Their high reliance on climate-sensitive livelihoods renders rural communities particularly vulnerable to the impacts of both sudden and slow-onset hazards. Environmental factors, including land degradation, water scarcity and climatic shocks and stresses, are bound to exacerbate the adverse drivers of migration, further compounding the interlocking vulnerabilities of people living in poverty in rural areas.<sup>29</sup> Women and children generally experience greater difficulty in accessing safe and regular migration pathways when faced with little choice but to migrate in search of safety or opportunity.<sup>30</sup>

### C. Agricultural development and rural livelihoods

26. Worldwide, more than one in four workers are engaged in agriculture, mostly as self-employed and unpaid family workers. Rural populations are twice as likely to be in informal employment as those in urban areas; in the agriculture sector, 93.6 per cent of workers are in informal employment.<sup>31</sup>

27. While employment in primary agricultural production has declined for both men and women over the past two decades, more than 1.2 billion people are employed in agrifood systems and 3.8 billion live in households that are linked to livelihoods in agrifood systems.<sup>32</sup> Employment in agrifood systems is particularly high in Africa and Asia, accounting for 62 and 40 per cent of total employment, respectively. In sub-Saharan Africa, 66 per cent of all employed women work in agrifood systems, which are a key source of employment for young women across many regions.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>25</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *Prospects for Children in the Polycrisis: A 2023 Global Outlook* (New York, 2022).

<sup>26</sup> Akihiko Nishio, "When poverty meets climate change: A critical challenge that demands cross-cutting solutions", World Bank Blogs, 5 November 2021.

<sup>27</sup> World Bank, *Global Economic Prospects*.

<sup>28</sup> Daniela Chiriac and Baysa Naran, *Examining the Climate Finance Gap for Small-Scale Agriculture*, Climate Policy Initiative and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) (2020).

<sup>29</sup> IOM, *Institutional Strategy on Migration, Environment and Climate Change 2021–2030* (Geneva, 2021).

<sup>30</sup> IOM, "Women and girls on the move: a snapshot of available evidence", Thematic Brief, Issue No. 2 (March 2023).

<sup>31</sup> ILO, *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture*, 3rd ed. (Geneva, 2018).

<sup>32</sup> FAO, *Estimating Global and Country-level Employment in Agrifood Systems*.

<sup>33</sup> FAO, "The status of women in agrifood systems".

28. In the fisheries sector, estimates based on 78 national household surveys show that 113 million people globally are either employed in the small-scale fisheries value chain or engaged in harvesting or processing for subsistence. Altogether, the number of those whose livelihoods are at least partially dependent on small-scale fisheries amounted to 492 million people as at 2016, the last year for which data is available. This means that, globally, approximately one in every 20 people depends on small-scale fisheries. In the 46 least developed countries, the share of the population dependent on small-scale fisheries doubled, reaching 13 per cent of their combined population.<sup>34</sup>

29. Small-scale fisheries account for almost 90 per cent of global fisheries employment and are an important source of employment for women, who make up 35 per cent of the total employment in fisheries. Roughly half of these women are employed in the post-harvest segment of the value chain. As in other agrifood system subsectors, female workers are significantly more likely than male workers to work part-time or in more vulnerable and less profitable segments of the value chain.<sup>35</sup>

30. Insecure land tenure and unequal land distribution affect agricultural productivity, growth and development. Worldwide, farms of less than 1 hectare account for 70 per cent of all farms, but operate only 7 per cent of all agricultural land. Smaller farms operate a far greater share of farmland in lower-income countries and regions, with farmland becoming more concentrated among larger farms as economies develop.<sup>36</sup> In many parts of the world, the land tenure systems of Indigenous Peoples are based on collective rights, customary laws and traditions, but often are not recognized by national legal systems.<sup>37</sup>

31. As a result of inadequate agricultural and rural development policy, poor-quality infrastructure and public services, low asset endowments, lack of working capital and high exposure to natural hazards, much of the world's rural population is confined to low-productivity subsistence and small-scale agriculture, which serves mainly local markets and is cut off from increasingly globalized and concentrated national and international supply chains. While rural labour markets must continue to absorb increasing numbers of young people in Africa, population loss and ageing are emerging issues in much of Latin America and Asia, with potentially major implications for rural economies, livelihoods and food security.<sup>38,39</sup>

## D. Gender equality

32. Agrifood systems are a more important source of livelihood for women than for men in low- and middle-income countries. Women's limited access to education, basic infrastructure and markets, along with their high burden of unpaid and care work, constrain their opportunities for off-farm work,<sup>40</sup> which tends to be associated with higher incomes.<sup>41</sup> Gender norms restrict their participation in more profitable value

<sup>34</sup> FAO, Duke University and WorldFish Center, *Illuminating Hidden Harvests: The Contributions of Small-Scale Fisheries to Sustainable Development* (Rome, 2023).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Sarah K. Lowder, Marco V. Sánchez and Raffaele Bertini, "Which farms feed the world and has farmland become more concentrated?", *World Development*, vol. 142 (June 2021).

<sup>37</sup> IFAD, *The Land Tenure Security Advantage: A Catalytic Asset for Sustainable and Inclusive Rural Transformation* (2020).

<sup>38</sup> ILO, "Advancing social justice and decent work".

<sup>39</sup> FAO, *The Future of Food and Agriculture: Trends and Challenges* (Rome, 2017).

<sup>40</sup> FAO, "The status of women in agrifood systems".

<sup>41</sup> Ana Paula De la O Campos and others, *Economic Transformation and Diversification towards Off-Farm Income in Rural and Urban Areas: A Global Update with a Focus on Sub-Saharan Africa*. FAO Agricultural Development Economics Working Paper, No. 23-05 (Rome, 2023).

chains and activities dominated by men. When women engage in off-farm work, they are often confined to more precarious and poorly or non-remunerated activities.<sup>42</sup>

33. Women's access to land, inputs, services, finance and digital technology lags behind that of men. On average, women are less likely to own land, have less livestock and significantly less access to inputs and services.<sup>43</sup> The gender gap in land productivity between female- and male-managed farms of the same size is 24 per cent, and women earn 18.4 per cent less in agricultural wage employment than men do. This is due in large part to the persistence of discriminatory social norms.<sup>44</sup>

34. Women's more limited resources, assets and agency limit their adaptive capacity and resilience in the face of shocks. In the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, 22 per cent of women globally lost their jobs in the off-farm segments of agrifood systems, compared with only 2 per cent of men.<sup>45</sup>

35. The cascading pandemic, climate, conflict and cost-of-living crises have exacerbated women's unpaid domestic and care burden, while contributing to high levels of domestic violence and harmful practices such as child marriage.<sup>46</sup>

## E. Indigenous Peoples

36. The multiple and overlapping crises have a disproportionate impact on specific rural populations. In particular, poverty coupled with the climate crisis have acute impacts on women and girls, especially among Indigenous Peoples and in rural and migrant contexts.<sup>47,48</sup>

37. Indigenous Peoples have historically suffered from the dispossession of their lands, territories and resources, undermining their development in accordance with their own needs and interests.<sup>49</sup> Globally, 74 per cent of Indigenous Peoples live in rural areas and are dependent on agrifood systems for their livelihoods.<sup>50</sup> Indigenous Peoples are more than twice as likely to live in extreme poverty than non-Indigenous rural populations.<sup>51</sup> Indigenous Peoples' food systems, which make use of several hundred species of edible and nutritious flora and fauna, are eroding alarmingly fast.<sup>52</sup>

38. As a result, their diet is increasingly dependent on highly processed foods, a growing public health concern. Indigenous Peoples also suffer from higher rates of malnutrition worldwide than do non-Indigenous people.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>42</sup> FAO, "The status of women in agrifood systems".

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. Women, for instance, own less agricultural land than men in 40 of 46 countries reporting on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 5.a.1, and half of countries reporting on indicator 5.a.2 have weak legal protections for women's land rights.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> FAO, "The status of women in agrifood systems"; and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development 2019: Why Addressing Women's Income and Time Poverty Matters for Sustainable Development* (United Nations Publication, 2020).

<sup>47</sup> [E/CN.6/2022/3](#).

<sup>48</sup> FAO, *The White/Wiphala Paper on Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems* (Rome, 2021).

<sup>49</sup> United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

<sup>50</sup> ILO, *Implementing the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169: Towards an Inclusive, Sustainable and Just Future* (Geneva, 2020).

<sup>51</sup> *World Social Report 2021*; and UNDP and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2021: Unmasking Disparities by Ethnicity, Caste and Gender* (2021).

<sup>52</sup> FAO, *White/Wiphala Paper*.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.



## F. Decent work

39. Rural poverty is strongly associated with employment in agriculture, as small-scale producers and wage labourers face stagnant productivity, poorly functioning markets and low wages.<sup>54</sup> Seasonality, informality, price and climate shocks and limited decent off-farm job opportunities exacerbate small-scale producers' vulnerability to poverty.<sup>55</sup>

40. Decent work deficits are particularly high among certain segments of rural populations. Rural women are often concentrated in low-skilled informal jobs characterized by low pay, poor working conditions and limited access to social protection.<sup>56,57</sup> A similar situation is found among rural youth, who represent a large share of workers in agrifood systems<sup>58,59</sup> Migrants, who carry out more than a quarter of the world's farm work, are especially prone to abusive working conditions.<sup>60</sup>

41. Of the 160 million child workers globally in 2020, 70 per cent worked in agriculture.<sup>61</sup> Cross-country evidence suggests that child labour increased in rural communities during the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>62</sup> Transitions in employment from the non-agriculture to the agriculture sector and from wage employment to self-employment were common in rural areas, especially among the least educated, which suggests that job quality deteriorated for poorer workers, exacerbating pre-existing vulnerabilities and decent work deficits in rural areas.<sup>63</sup>

## G. Food security and nutrition

42. Globally, nearly 1 in 10 people suffers from hunger. More than three quarters of them live in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, which is home to 55 per cent of the world's total rural population. If current trends continue, almost 600 million people will be chronically undernourished by 2030, far exceeding the Sustainable Development Goal of zero hunger.<sup>64</sup>

43. Affordability constitutes a major barrier to food sufficiency and diet diversity. Because people living in extreme poverty spend two thirds of their budgets on food, soaring food prices hit them hardest. Every additional 1 per cent increase in food prices will push nearly 10 million more people into extreme poverty, placing food further beyond their means.<sup>65</sup> Already, more than 3.1 billion cannot afford the costs of a healthy diet.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>54</sup> World Bank, *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020*.

<sup>55</sup> ILO, *Decent Work Deficits among Rural Workers: Key Findings and Recommendations for Trade Unions* (Geneva, 2022).

<sup>56</sup> ILO, "Advancing social justice and decent work".

<sup>57</sup> FAO, "The status of women in agrifood systems".

<sup>58</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Jobs for Rural Youth: The Role of Local Food Economies* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2021).

<sup>59</sup> FAO, *Estimating Global and Country-level Employment in Agrifood Systems*.

<sup>60</sup> IOM and FAO, *Integrating Migration into Rural Development Interventions* (Brussels, 2021).

<sup>61</sup> ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook, Trends 2023* (Geneva, 2023).

<sup>62</sup> FAO, *The COVID-19 Consequences on Child Labour in Agrifood Systems* (Rome, 2022).

<sup>63</sup> World Bank, *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2022*.

<sup>64</sup> FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and World Health Organization (WHO), *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023: Urbanization, Agrifood Systems Transformation and Health Diets across the Rural-Urban Continuum* (Rome, 2023).

<sup>65</sup> Daniel Gerszon Mahler and others, "Pandemic, prices, and poverty", World Bank Blogs, 13 April 2022.

<sup>66</sup> FAO and others, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023*.

44. The prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity is higher than it was in 2015, with proportionally more women affected than men in every region of the world. The rise in food insecurity became especially pronounced following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and has remained high as a result of the price shocks and the weak post-pandemic economic recovery in many parts of the world.<sup>67</sup>

45. The ongoing cost-of-living crisis is exacerbating hunger and malnutrition in poorer and rural areas, as well as in places experiencing conflict, extreme weather events and economic shocks. Children born to poorer, lower-educated rural mothers are less likely to have a recorded birth weight compared with children born to richer and higher-educated urban mothers.<sup>68</sup> Children in rural settings and poorer households are therefore more vulnerable to stunting and wasting, while adolescent girls and women in rural areas are more likely to be underweight, have shorter height and be anaemic.<sup>69</sup>

46. People in rural areas are also affected by the high prices of farming inputs. Food price inflation is making nutritious diets ever less affordable to rural consumers; at the same time, rural producers are not reaping the benefits of higher prices at the farm gate. Costlier farming inputs, in turn, affect agricultural production through a decline in fertilizer use, which threatens to undermine food supply at a time when food access is already at risk. Small-scale family farmers are especially vulnerable, as they tend to have fewer resources to help them to adapt to price swings in agricultural inputs.

47. At the global level, food security appears to improve with urbanization. In 2022, moderate or severe food insecurity affected one third of adults living in rural areas compared with one quarter in urban areas. In low-income and lower-middle-income countries, food insecurity is higher in rural areas as opposed to urban or peri-urban areas. In high-income countries, by contrast, food insecurity is worse in urban compared with rural areas.<sup>70</sup>

48. In the Horn of Africa and in countries facing humanitarian crises, the negative impact of food price inflation amplifies the disruptions to farming activities and humanitarian aid, including droughts and flooding, pests, economic turbulence, conflict and insecurity, which expose a large portion of their populations to the threat of acute food insecurity and, in extreme situations, famine or starvation. Those most at risk are overwhelmingly rural populations – farmers, fishers, herders and foresters – whose livelihoods have been significantly affected by these drivers.<sup>71,72,73</sup>

## H. Education

49. On average, students across the globe lost half a year of schooling owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to United Nations estimates, nearly 500 million students from pre-primary to upper secondary school, three quarters of whom lived in rural areas, did not have any access to remote learning during the school

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.; and UNICEF, *Undernourished and Overlooked: A Global Nutrition Crisis in Adolescent Girls and Women* (New York, 2023).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> FAO and others, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023*.

<sup>71</sup> WFP and FAO, “Hunger hotspots: FAO-WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity – October 2022 to January 2023 outlook” (Rome, 2022).

<sup>72</sup> Food Security Information Network and Global Network Against Food Crises, *Global Report on Food Crises 2023* (Rome, 2023).

<sup>73</sup> FAO, “Importance of investing in agriculture in emergency contexts”, briefing note (March 2023).

closures.<sup>74,75</sup> Even where school attendance rebounded, the learning process was negatively affected, with some children never returning to school.

50. The COVID-19 crisis confirmed that the poorest and most marginalized children suffer the most during crises. They are less likely to access remote learning or have parental support to keep learning at home. They also have worse learning outcomes and are more likely to drop out of school permanently.<sup>76</sup>

51. The COVID-19 crisis, by hitting students in rural areas especially hard, magnified pre-existing inequalities in education and learning. In low-income countries, only 23 rural residents complete secondary school for every 100 urban residents who do. Educational inequalities persist for young people and adults. In many countries, adults in rural areas are less literate and have lower access to learning opportunities than urban dwellers.<sup>77</sup>

52. The quality of education in rural schools tends to be lower than in urban settings because of shortages of qualified teachers and relevant learning materials, the use of inappropriate languages of instruction and a lack of safe and enabling learning environments. Globally, approximately 40 per cent of adults living in extreme poverty have no education, compared with only 9 per cent of the non-poor.<sup>78</sup> Low educational attainment is commonly associated with stunting, underweight and anaemia.<sup>79</sup>

## I. Health

53. Health inequities between rural and urban areas continue to be driven by underperforming health systems in many rural areas and adverse social and environmental determinants of health. Persistent gaps in the availability of health workers in rural and remote areas contribute to an estimated 2 billion people not having access to the health services they need within their communities.<sup>80</sup>

54. Determinants of spatial inequalities in economic development, such as lack of electrification, are also determinants of health; rural health facilities often report less access to electrification and less reliable electrical supply than their urban counterparts, with implications for the delivery of quality health services.<sup>81</sup> Access to assistive medical devices (such as spectacles, hearing aids, prostheses and wheelchairs) is also typically lower for people living in rural areas compared with those in urban areas.<sup>82</sup> By contrast, impoverishing out-of-pocket household health expenditures are higher in rural areas. For example, the percentage of the population pushed into extreme poverty by out-of-pocket health expenditures was three times

<sup>74</sup> Harry Anthony Patrinos, Emiliana Vegas and Rohan Carter-Rau, “An Analysis of COVID-19 Student Learning Loss”, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, No. 10033 (May 2022).

<sup>75</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and Education*, 3rd ed. (Paris, 2020).

<sup>76</sup> World Bank Group, *Prioritizing Learning during COVID-19: The Most Effective Ways to Keep Children Learning during and Post-Pandemic – Recommendations of the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel* (Washington, D.C., 2022).

<sup>77</sup> UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report*.

<sup>78</sup> Castañeda and others, “A new profile of the global poor”.

<sup>79</sup> UNICEF, *Undernourished and Overlooked*; and FAO and others, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023*.

<sup>80</sup> WHO, *WHO Guideline on Health Workforce Development, Attraction, Recruitment and Retention in Rural and Remote Areas* (Geneva, 2021).

<sup>81</sup> WHO and others, *Energizing health: accelerating electricity access in health-care facilities* (2023).

<sup>82</sup> WHO, *Global Report on Health Equity for Persons with Disabilities* (Geneva, 2022); and WHO and UNICEF, *Global Report on Assistive Technology* (2022).

higher in rural than in urban areas in 80 countries with estimates available from 2011 onwards.<sup>83</sup>

55. In the current global context, mental health services in rural areas have emerged as a particularly salient topic. In many countries, mental health services are disproportionately concentrated in or near major cities, leaving rural populations behind.<sup>84</sup> Farmers can face psychological distress, depression and anxiety, owing to specific occupational and contextual stressors and barriers to support. Pesticide self-poisonings cause up to one fifth of all suicides globally and are of particular concern in rural agricultural communities. Banning the sale and use of acutely toxic, highly hazardous pesticides would lead to fewer deaths, including by suicide.<sup>85</sup>

## J. Infrastructure

56. Approximately 8 out of 10 people worldwide who lack access to safe drinking water services live in rural areas, as do 7 out of 10 of those who lack basic sanitation services. Gaps are also pervasive in relation to electricity and transportation: 84 per cent of the 760 million people without connection to a power grid in 2019 lived in rural areas, while in most developing countries, less than 60 per cent of rural residents live within 2 km of all-season roads.<sup>86</sup>

57. Substandard housing, inadequate sanitation and a lack of access to piped or improved drinking water, electricity and clean cooking fuels are the most common deprivations captured in measurements of multidimensional poverty.<sup>87</sup> They have a direct impact on women's time and the drudgery associated with unpaid care and domestic work.<sup>88</sup>

58. In almost all countries with disaggregated data, basic sanitation coverage is higher in urban schools than in rural schools, with implications for school attendance and child health.<sup>89</sup> Poor infrastructure extends to the lack of adequate drainage and flood protection systems, which tend to be least developed in lower-income countries, exposing marginal rural communities to recurrent floods.<sup>90</sup>

## K. Social protection

59. Social protection measures played a crucial role during the response to COVID-19 and continue to support people during shocks and normal life events. Between January 2022 and April 2023, nearly 1,300 social protection measures were announced or implemented across 180 countries to counter the impacts of inflation, more than half of them in low- and middle-income countries. One third of these

<sup>83</sup> WHO, Health Inequality Data Repository (2023). Available at <https://www.who.int/data/inequality-monitor/data>.

<sup>84</sup> WHO, *World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All* (Geneva, 2022).

<sup>85</sup> WHO and FAO, "Preventing suicide: a resource for pesticide registrars and regulators" (Geneva, 2019).

<sup>86</sup> *World Social Report 2021*. Gaps are even greater in African least developed countries, where in 2020 only 8 and 21.5 per cent of rural residents had access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, respectively, while rates of access to electricity stood at 24 per cent, compared with 70 per cent in urban areas. See [E/CA/COE/41/20](https://www.un.org/development/desa/pubs/2021/04/2021-world-social-report).

<sup>87</sup> FAO and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, *Measuring Rural Poverty with a Multidimensional Approach*; and UNDP and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2021*.

<sup>88</sup> UN-Women, *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development 2019*.

<sup>89</sup> UNICEF and WHO, *Progress on Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Schools: 2000–2021 Data Update* (New York, 2022).

<sup>90</sup> World Bank, *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020*.

measures consisted of subsidies, and another third were in the form of social assistance payments, mostly unconditional cash transfers.<sup>91</sup>

60. Evidence shows that, apart from protecting assets during shocks, social protection promotes economic inclusion in rural areas and reduces poverty in the long term by facilitating human capital accumulation, enabling investments in productive activities and supporting climate adaptation.<sup>92,93,94</sup> Social protection has been shown to reduce the cost of and to ease the adoption of climate-smart farming practices by small-scale producers in low-income countries.<sup>95</sup> In fragile settings, social assistance payments often provide a lifeline to conflict-afflicted households.

61. However, social protection coverage remains very low, with more than half of the global population completely excluded from any social protection benefits. Coverage and adequacy gaps are larger in rural areas where the incidence of informality and of part-time, temporary and self-employment is higher.<sup>96</sup> Delivery systems are generally weakest and less fit to rural realities in remote, sparsely populated areas and in conflict-affected settings, where needs and deprivations are greatest.

## L. Financial and digital inclusion

62. Only 60 per cent of the rural population in developing countries have an account with a financial institution.<sup>97</sup> In sub-Saharan Africa, 62 per cent of unbanked adults are rural dwellers.<sup>98</sup> Even when people do have an account, usage remains low, as financial products and services continue to be designed primarily for the needs of urban customers.

63. While the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the expansion of digital tools such as mobile money services, about 70 per cent of the global demand for smallholder finance is estimated to remain unmet.<sup>99</sup> For instance, only one in four users of digital agriculture solutions in sub-Saharan Africa are women.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, only 19 per cent of the world's smallholder population currently has access to some type of agricultural insurance, with the largest gap found in South and South-East Asia, where three quarters of uninsured smallholders reside.<sup>101</sup>

64. Despite the promise of digitalization, large gaps persist that most heavily affect rural women, young people, Indigenous Peoples, migrants and other population

<sup>91</sup> Ugo Gentilini and others, "Tracking Global Social Protection Responses to Inflation", World Bank Discussion Paper, No. 2305 (Washington, D.C., 2023).

<sup>92</sup> FAO, "The contribution of social protection for economic inclusion in rural areas" (Rome, 2020).

<sup>93</sup> World Bank, *The State of Economic Inclusion Report: The Potential to Scale* (Washington, D.C., 2021).

<sup>94</sup> Cecilia Costella and others, "Can social protection tackle risks emerging from climate change, and how? A framework and a critical review", *Climate Risk Management*, vol. 40 (2023).

<sup>95</sup> Antonio Scognamiglio and Nicholas J. Sitko, "Leveraging social protection to advance climate-smart agriculture", *World Development*, vol. 146 (October 2021).

<sup>96</sup> ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2020–2022: Social Protection at the Crossroads – In Pursuit of a Better Future* (Geneva, 2021).

<sup>97</sup> Alliance for Financial Inclusion, "Enhancing financial inclusion in rural areas", Guideline Note, No. 50 (May 2022).

<sup>98</sup> Asli Demirgüç-Kunt and others, *The Global Findex Database 2021: Financial Inclusion, Digital Payments, and Resilience in the Age of COVID-19*, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank (Washington, D.C., 2022).

<sup>99</sup> Alliance for Financial Inclusion, "Enhancing financial inclusion in rural areas".

<sup>100</sup> United Nations, *Tackling Inequalities in Public Service Coverage to 'Build Forward Better' for the Rural Poor*, policy brief by the HLCP Inequalities Task Team (2021).

<sup>101</sup> ISF Advisors, "Protecting growing prosperity: agricultural insurance in the developing world", September 2018.

groups. Globally, nearly twice as many residents in urban areas were using the Internet in 2022 compared with residents in rural areas (82 vs. 45 per cent).<sup>102</sup> In the least developed countries, 13 per cent of the rural population have no mobile coverage, and another 13 per cent are covered only by a 2G network.<sup>103</sup> As a result, large numbers of people in rural areas remain effectively excluded from the digital solutions and financial services they need to improve their resilience and livelihoods.

## M. Rural institutions

65. Rural institutions such as producer organizations, cooperatives, self-help and community-based groups can provide essential services, especially to those who belong to poor and isolated communities.<sup>104</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic and other climate and conflict-related shocks, rural institutions played crucial roles in providing social protection and linking rural populations to innovative tools such as digital platforms. Producer organizations were also at the forefront of COVID-19 responses, demonstrating their importance as institutions for emergency response and human development during crises.<sup>105</sup>

66. However, in most contexts, rural institutions continue to underserve marginalized farmers, including younger, less-educated and female farmers.<sup>106</sup> This limits their ability to participate in decision-making, access services and take full advantage of economic opportunities, with significant implications for their productivity and resilience to shocks.<sup>107</sup>

67. In order to maximize the potential of rural institutions and collective action, efforts must be invested in strengthening the capacities and skills of local actors to enable meaningful participation and transparent and effective governance. Local government authorities likewise need support and resources, in particular in decentralized governance systems where the responsibility for service provision is sometimes delegated to them without the requisite enabling factors, including funding, for effective performance.

## IV. Eradicating rural poverty within the context of the decade of action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030

68. Bold and urgent action is needed to reverse the trend in rural poverty reduction and to renew the momentum towards the elimination of poverty in all its forms and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Our Common Agenda, the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions, the United Nations Food Systems Summit, the United Nations Decade of Family Farming and the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration offer reinforcing policy frameworks for accelerating action towards inclusive, sustainable and resilient development that contributes to bridging the present rural-urban divide.

<sup>102</sup> International Telecommunication Unit, *Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures* (2022).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> FAO, *Strengthening Rural Institutions and Empowering People to Reduce Poverty and Inequalities* (2018).

<sup>105</sup> FAO, “Good performance and inclusiveness of poor people in cooperatives and other producer organizations: a possible match?” (Rome, 2023).

<sup>106</sup> Livia Bizikova and others, “A scoping review of the contributions of farmers’ organizations to smallholder agriculture”, *Nature Food*, vol. 1 (2020).

<sup>107</sup> FAO, “Strategic work of FAO to reduce rural poverty” (2017).

69. Rights-based policies that leave no one behind must drive actions to buffer marginalized communities from shocks and increase their resilience to future crises. This requires investments in key social services and in social protection systems that provide income security, shield people against shocks and enable human capital accumulation; it also requires attention to decent work, gender equality and inclusive climate action. Evidence-based and coordinated policies, along with up-to-date and disaggregated data and monitoring, inclusive and transparent institutional arrangements, sound delivery systems and adequate and sustainable financing, are key priorities for every country.

70. Economic diversification in rural areas, urbanization and the transformation of agrifood systems have strengthened the linkages between urban and rural areas, adding more complexity to our understanding of rural poverty. Instead of treating urban and rural areas in binary terms, a balanced territorial approach along a continuum that includes intermediate settlements and cities nested in the midst of agricultural zones, with varying levels of agglomeration, is required to reduce rural poverty and persistent inequalities between urban, peri-urban and rural areas.<sup>108,109,110</sup>

71. People living in poverty, the majority of whom reside in rural areas, are being negatively affected by the slow post-pandemic economic recovery, the high price of food and other commodities, the recurrence of climate shocks and conflict. The food crisis is hitting children particularly hard: 220 million children across low- and middle-income countries already experience severe food poverty. If prices remain at historically high levels, there is a risk that the number of children suffering from food poverty will increase further, particularly among the poorest and those living in rural households.<sup>111</sup>

72. Global energy prices are likewise driving sharp increases in the cost of living globally, and the outlook for 2023 and beyond remains uncertain.<sup>112</sup> Immediate food or cash assistance, along with complementary interventions to increase agricultural production and rein in the price of food and farm inputs, will be needed to avoid further impoverishment and hunger.

73. Rural households tend to rely on natural capital and ecosystem services for their livelihoods and are the most affected by environmental degradation, climate change and extreme weather events. This is particularly true for women, who are more dependent on environmental goods but have less access to them and fewer resources to fall back on when shocks hit.<sup>113</sup> To increase their resilience, social protection needs to be better integrated with disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation through, for instance, public employment programmes that use climate exposure and vulnerability mapping tools, build durable assets and restore degraded landscapes and aquatic sources.<sup>114</sup>

74. Extending social protection coverage to rural populations implies that actions must be taken to remove the legal, administrative and financial barriers that hinder

<sup>108</sup> *World Social Report 2021*.

<sup>109</sup> IFAD, *Creating Opportunities for Rural Youth: Rural Development Report 2019* (Rome, 2019).

<sup>110</sup> Andre Devaux and others, "Agricultural innovation and inclusive value-chain development: a review", *Journal of Agribusiness in Developing and Emerging Economies*, vol. 8, 12 March 2018.

<sup>111</sup> UNICEF, *Prospects for Children in the Polycrisis*. On average, a 5 per cent increase in the real price of food will lead to a 9 per cent increase in the risk of wasting and a 14 per cent increase in the risk of severe wasting.

<sup>112</sup> World Bank, *Global Economic Prospects*.

<sup>113</sup> United Nations, *Tackling Inequalities in Public Service Coverage*.

<sup>114</sup> Hare Krishna Kundo and others, "Mainstreaming climate adaptation into social protection", *Journal of International Development*, vol. 33 (2021).

their access to social benefits.<sup>115</sup> Universal social protection not only cushions poor households against shocks and normal life contingencies, but helps them to diversify their livelihood sources and invest in higher-risk, higher-return activities on- and off-farm. Social protection also facilitates the adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices.<sup>116</sup>

75. As climate change-induced shocks and stresses increase in frequency, unpredictability and severity, inclusive rural finance can help poor people to reduce their vulnerability and protect ecosystems. Access to financial services can smooth household consumption, avoid the distress sale of assets and keep children in school, while insurance products can play a key role in building resilience to climate hazards that are infrequent but potentially catastrophic.<sup>117</sup>

76. Without investments in clean energy, 2.4 billion people will continue to cook using open fires or stoves fuelled by kerosene, biomass or coal that pollute and contribute to climate change.<sup>118</sup> Each year, 3.8 million people die prematurely from illness attributable to indoor air pollution caused by the inefficient use of solid fuels and kerosene for cooking. Access to clean cooking fuel and stoves remains much higher in urban areas, where 83 per cent of households have access, compared with only 32 per cent in rural areas.<sup>119</sup>

77. While climate-related funding has increased in recent years, it is still well short of the amount needed for mitigation and adaptation in developing countries. It is estimated that investments in sustainable agriculture or clean and renewable energy could lead to the creation of an additional 8.4 million jobs for young people by 2030.<sup>120</sup> Creating opportunities for rural and Indigenous young people by removing constraints on their access to land, natural resources, finance, technology, knowledge and information can boost rural economies and yield great results in terms of poverty reduction, employment generation and food and nutrition security.<sup>121</sup>

78. Weak infrastructure and service provision, combined with the lack of attractive off-farm job opportunities, exacerbate the rural-urban divide and contribute to rural out-migration, especially of young people. Removing bottlenecks in access to basic infrastructure and technology, including telecommunications, can make a substantial contribution to reducing rural poverty.<sup>122</sup>

79. It is imperative to tackle inequalities in public service coverage in rural areas. Greater investments in public services and basic infrastructure, including the provision of childcare, can connect remote communities to markets, generate employment opportunities and increase incomes. Such investments are also key to reducing drudgery, increasing the productivity of women's work and breaking the vicious cycle of women's time and income poverty.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>115</sup> ILO and FAO, *Extending Social Protection to Rural Populations: Perspectives for a Common FAO and ILO Approach* (Geneva, 2021).

<sup>116</sup> Scognamillo and Sitko, "Leveraging social protection".

<sup>117</sup> Howard Miller, Lakshmi Krishnan and Lucciana Alvarez Ruiz, "Green Inclusive Finance: A framework for understanding how financial services can help low-income and vulnerable people respond to climate change", Center for Financial Inclusion (2023).

<sup>118</sup> WHO, "Household air pollution fact sheet" 28 November 2022. Available at [www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/household-air-pollution-and-health](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/household-air-pollution-and-health).

<sup>119</sup> United Nations, *Tackling Inequalities in Public Service Coverage*.

<sup>120</sup> UNICEF, *Prospects for Children in the Polycrisis*.

<sup>121</sup> IFAD, *Creating Opportunities for Rural Youth*.

<sup>122</sup> Cristi Spulbar and others, "Digitalization as a factor in reducing poverty and its implications in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic", *Sustainability*, vol. 14 (August 2022).

<sup>123</sup> FAO, "The status of women in agrifood systems".



80. Interventions that integrate explicit actions towards gender equality and women's empowerment are more likely to bring about lasting improvements in women's welfare and increase resilience. The impacts are largest when social norms and institutional barriers that discriminate against women are also addressed.<sup>124</sup>

81. Improvements in agricultural productivity are needed to create new economic opportunities for rural communities in both the farm and off-farm sectors. Building strong linkages between these two sectors will facilitate the transfer of the gains from agriculture into demand for labour, inputs and services in off-farm activities. Expanding access to adequate infrastructure and technology, including digital innovations, can be a powerful enabler for small-scale producers and help to raise the living standards of people residing in rural areas worldwide.<sup>125</sup>

82. Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia highlights the potential of well-designed extension and marketing support policies. They can increase investment and productivity among poor smallholder producers in low-income and middle-income countries, resulting in long-term increases in agricultural income.<sup>126</sup> Local and territorial markets, which connect consumers to producers and connect urban with rural areas, have an important role to play.<sup>127</sup>

83. Producer organizations and agricultural cooperatives have been shown to be an effective means of engaging small-scale producers in value chains and helping them to overcome the high transaction costs that hamper their access to markets. Informal institutions, such as savings groups, have also been key for enabling rural women and young people to access finance and reduce their vulnerability to shocks. Stronger participatory governance arrangements and collective action can give voice and influence to the marginalized groups of the population in rural areas.<sup>128</sup>

## V. Conclusions and recommendations

84. Reversing the trends of increasing rural poverty and hunger and setting countries on the path to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 1 will require immediate and longer-term inclusive, rights-based and multisectoral policies to cushion households and preserve purchasing power in times of shocks, address the structural drivers of rural poverty and increase household and community resilience to future crises.

85. In the current context of limited fiscal space and the ongoing recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, there must be efforts to ensure that adequate financing is available to support country responses to the challenge of rural poverty, especially in countries in special situations, such as African countries, the least developed and landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and middle-income countries, that are facing specific challenges.

86. Member States may wish to consider the following recommendations to cushion the compounded effects of shocks on rural poverty and speed up the pace towards its eradication:

**(a) Implement integrated, coherent measures to support small-scale producers with the aim of sustainably increasing their productivity, connecting**

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> *World Social Report 2021*.

<sup>126</sup> Leah Bridle and others, "Experimental insights on the constraints to agricultural technology adoption" Agricultural Technology Adoption Initiative Working Paper (March 2019).

<sup>127</sup> FAO, *Consumer Organizations in Action: A Collection of Practices Driving the Right to Adequate Food* (Rome, 2021).

<sup>128</sup> FAO and others, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023*.

them to markets, promoting their integration into agrifood value chains on fair terms and expanding their opportunities for productive employment and decent work on- and off-farm;

(b) Expand social protection coverage in rural areas by embedding its extension in policy and legal frameworks that uphold people's right to food and an adequate standard of living. In countries affected by conflict and fragility, efforts should be made to strengthen the linkages between the delivery of humanitarian aid and the public social protection system, where it exists;

(c) Close gaps in provision by increasing investments in public services and basic infrastructure in rural areas, including in health care, education, clean water and basic sanitation, housing, roads, irrigation and electrification;

(d) Leverage digital solutions to boost farmer productivity, facilitate access to digital finance and extension services and accelerate rural economic transformation, making sure that accompanying measures are in place to increase digital literacy and expand access to digital infrastructure, especially among women, older persons, Indigenous Peoples and other population groups prone to exclusion;

(e) Promote investments in clean energy, ecosystem restoration and the adoption of inclusive climate actions that enhance the access of small-scale producers to climate finance, including for adaptation efforts;

(f) Foster rural development and agrifood system transformations that are inclusive and equitable by enhancing rural women's access to and control over land, productive resources and decent work opportunities along agrifood value chains; by giving due recognition to their excessive burden of unpaid care and domestic work; and by combatting discriminatory social norms and practices that constrain their autonomy and agency.

(g) Ensure the transfer of technical, financial and managerial skills and resources to local governments and development actors, strengthen the voice and participation of rural stakeholders – in particular, small-scale producers and family farmers, landless people, women and young people, migrants and Indigenous Peoples – in policy design and implementation, and create space for rural organizations, cooperatives and self-help groups to be consulted and take part in decision-making over matters affecting them.

(h) Recognize and strengthen Indigenous Peoples' rights to communal lands, territories and natural resources and protect their traditional food systems and livelihoods, which play a vital role in restoring ecosystems and maintaining biodiversity.