

**Commission on the Status of Women**

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**Follow-up to ECOSOC resolutions and decisions**

**Promoting an integrated approach to rural development in  
developing countries for eradication of poverty and sustainable  
development**

**Note by the Secretariat**

Summary

The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2001/27 of 26 July 2001, invited its functional commissions to provide concise, action-oriented input to its annual high-level and/or coordination segments. At its high-level segment of 2003, the Council will consider “Promoting an integrated approach to rural development in developing countries for eradication of poverty and sustainable development”. The present note provides an overview of actions contained in the Beijing Platform for Action, the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, and relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women aimed at the situation of women in rural areas. This information could assist the Commission on the Status of Women, should it consider providing an input to the Council’s 2003 high-level segment.

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### **I. Introduction**

1. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2001/27, invited its functional commissions to provide concise, action-oriented input to its annual high-level and/or coordination segments. The Council, in its decision 2002/309 of 19 December 2002, adopted the following themes for its session of 2003: for its high-level segment: Promoting an integrated approach to rural development in developing countries for eradication of poverty and sustainable development; for its coordination segment: The role of ECOSOC in the integrated and coordinated implementation of the outcomes of and follow-up to major UN conferences and summits.

2. The present note has been prepared by the Secretariat to assist the Commission on the Status of Women, should it consider providing an input to the Council's 2003 high-level segment.

## II. Background

3. The situation of rural women has been an issue of concern to the international community for several decades. The four World Conferences on Women in 1975, 1980, 1985 and 1995, as well as the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in 2000 (A/RES/S-23/3, annex), explicitly considered this question, and adopted comprehensive sets of policy recommendations as part of their outcome documents. Issues covered by these recommendations included rural women's access to and control over productive resources, such as land, capital, credit and technology, questions of gainful employment and unpaid labour, participation in decision-making, food security issues, and the education and health of rural women.

4. Since 1985, the General Assembly has regularly considered the situation of rural women and adopted resolutions thereon<sup>1</sup>. Recently, the discussion focused on the situation of rural women in the context of emerging global trends and the impact of these trends on rural development. The gender perspectives of issues such as liberalization of trade and markets for food and other agricultural products, the commercialization and modernization of agriculture and the increasing privatization of resources and services received attention, and comprehensive recommendations were proposed to improve the situation of rural women, in particular within the context of globalization<sup>2</sup>.

5. In the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Commission on the Status of Women considered the situation of rural women as a cross-cutting concern within the framework of its deliberations on particular themes, rather than focusing specifically on the situation of rural women. For example, the question of land ownership and access to other productive resources, including water, of rural women was discussed during the fortieth, forty-first and forty-sixth sessions when the Commission considered themes related to the Platform for Action's critical areas of concern on women and poverty, and women and the environment.

6. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is unique among international human rights instruments in addressing the situation of rural women. According to article 14, "States parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the Convention to women in rural areas". The Convention enumerates a range of measures States parties are expected to take to ensure

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<sup>1</sup> See resolutions 40/106 of 13 December 1985, 44/78 of 8 December 1989, 40/109 of 20 December 1993, 50/165 of 22 December 1995, 52/93 of 12 December 1997, 54/135 of 17 December 1999 and 56/129 of 19 December 2001, as well as the Secretary-General's reports contained in A/40/239 and Add.1; A/44/516; A/48/187; A/50/257/rev.1; A/52/326; A/54/123 and A/56/268.

<sup>2</sup> Reports of the Secretary-General on the "Improvement of the situation of women in rural areas", A/54/123 and A/56/268; and GA resolutions 54/135 and 56/129.

that rural women can, on a basis of equality with men, participate in and benefit from rural development.

### **III. Promoting a gender-sensitive integrated approach to rural development in developing countries for eradication of poverty and sustainable development**

7. The Beijing Platform for Action, the outcome documents of the 23<sup>rd</sup> special session and the resolutions of the General Assembly address the gender perspectives of a significant range of issues in rural development. They put forward recommendations for action to ensure that the specific needs and priorities of rural women are addressed in poverty eradication and sustainable development strategies in general, and in rural development strategies in particular. While a number of these recommendations are specifically targeted to rural women, others include rural women among other groups of women that require particular attention. Relevant recommendations in these documents have been systematized into the areas below.

#### **Gender-sensitive development strategies to enhance the situation of rural women**

8. The Platform for Action noted that “while poverty affects households as a whole, because of the gender division of labour and responsibilities for household welfare, women bear a disproportionate burden, attempting to manage household consumption and production under conditions of increasing scarcity. Poverty is particularly acute for women living in rural households” (para. 50). The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action also established gender mainstreaming as a critical strategy for the promotion of gender equality, including in relation to poverty eradication and sustainable development. A number of recommendations contained in intergovernmental documents aim at the creation of an enabling environment for improving the situation of rural women. Some examples of recommended actions are given below.

(a) ... attach greater importance to the improvement of the situation of rural women in their national, regional and global development strategies by, inter alia,

- \* creating an enabling environment for improving the situation of rural women, including integrating a gender perspective in macroeconomic policies and developing appropriate social support systems (GA resolution 56/129, para 6.a);

- \* integrating a gender perspective into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development policies and programmes with an emphasis on reducing the disproportionate number of rural women living in poverty (GA resolution 56/129, para 6.g);

(b) mobilize all parties involved in the development process, including academic institutions, non-governmental organizations and grass-roots and women's groups, to improve the effectiveness of anti-poverty programmes directed towards the poorest and most disadvantaged group of women, such as rural and indigenous women, female heads of household, young women and older women, refugees and migrant women and women with disabilities, recognizing that social development is primarily the responsibility of Governments (Platform for Action, para. 60 (a));

- (c) adapt environmental and agricultural policies and mechanisms, when necessary, to incorporate a gender perspective, and in cooperation with civil society, support farmers, particularly women farmers and those living in rural areas, with education and training programmes (A/RES/23-3/3, annex, para. 71 (b));
- (d) strive to reduce the disproportionate number of women living in poverty, in particular rural women, by implementing national poverty eradication programmes with a focus on a gender perspective (A/RES/23-3/3, annex, para. 71 (b));
- (e) undertake socio-economic policies that promote sustainable development and support and ensure poverty eradication programmes... to benefit women of all ages, in particular those living in poverty and marginalized women, including rural women..."(agreed conclusions of CSW, ECOSOC resolution 2002/5, para. 4 (v)).

**Economic empowerment of rural women, including access to and control over productive resources, and rural women's unpaid work**

9. A number of recommendations focus specifically on enhancing rural women's access to and control over productive resources, especially land, services (such as extension, training and credit), and markets. They also address ownership and control over land as critical factors that determine access to other productive resources and services, and participation in decision-making processes. The contribution of rural women to the well-being of their families and communities through unpaid work also receives attention. Some examples are given below.

(a) ... attach greater importance to the improvement of the situation of rural women in their national, regional and global development strategies by, inter alia,

- \* designing and revising laws to ensure that, where private ownership of land and property exists, rural women are accorded full and equal rights to own land and other property, including through the right to inheritance, and undertaking administrative reforms and other necessary measures to give women the same right as men to credit, capital, appropriate technologies and access to markets and information (GA resolution 56/129, para. 6 (b));

- \* developing specific assistance programmes and advisory services to promote economic skills of rural women in banking, modern trading and financial procedures and providing microcredit and other financial and business services to a greater number of women in rural areas for their economic empowerment (GA resolution 56/129, para. 6 (i));

(b) Mobilize to protect women's right to full and equal access to economic resources, including the right to inheritance and to ownership of land and other property, credit, natural resources and appropriate technologies (Platform for Action, para 60 (f));

(c) Enhance the access of disadvantaged women, including women entrepreneurs, in rural, remote and urban areas to financial services through strengthening links between

the formal banks and intermediary lending organizations, including legislative support, training for women and institutional strengthening for intermediary institutions with a view to mobilizing capital for those institutions and increasing the availability of credit (Platform for Action, para 62 (a));

(d) Encourage links between financial institutions and non-governmental organizations and support innovative lending practices, including those that integrate credit with women's services and training and provide credit facilities to rural women (Platform for Action, para. 62 (b));

(e) Ensure that national legislative and administrative reform processes, including those linked to land reform, decentralization and reorientation of the economy, promote women's rights, particularly those of rural women and women living in poverty, and take measures to promote and implement those rights through women's equal access to and control over economic resources, including land, property rights, right to inheritance, credit and traditional saving schemes, such as women's banks and cooperatives (A/RES/23-3/3, annex, para. 68 (h));

(f) Undertake socio-economic policies that promote sustainable development and support and ensure poverty eradication programmes, especially for women, by, inter alia, providing skills training, equal access to and control over resources, finance, credit, including microcredit, information and technology, and equal access to markets to benefit women of all ages, in particular those living in poverty and marginalized women, including rural women, indigenous women and female-headed households (A/RES/23-3/3, annex, para. 74 (a));

(g) Support the work of non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations in helping disadvantaged women, in particular rural women, in gaining access to financial institutions in establishing businesses and other sustainable means of livelihood (A/RES/23-3/3, annex, para 83 (b)).

(h) ... attach greater importance to the improvement of the situation of rural women in their national, regional and global development strategies by, inter alia,

\* taking steps towards ensuring that women's unpaid work and contributions to on-farm and off-farm production, including income generated in the informal sector, are visible, and assessing the feasibility of developing and improving mechanisms, such as time-use studies, to measure in quantitative terms unpaid work, recognizing the potential for it to be reflected in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes at the national and regional levels (GA resolution 56/129, para 6 (c ));

\* promoting programmes to enable rural women and men to reconcile their work and family responsibilities and to encourage men to share equally with women household and childcare responsibilities (GA resolution 56/129, para 6 (f)).

### **Rural women and food security**

10. Rural women's responsibilities for household food provision are addressed in a number of recommendations, reflecting their critical role in this area. Some examples are provided below.

(b) Formulate and implement policies and programmes that enhance the access of women agricultural and fisheries producers (including subsistence farmers and producers, especially in rural areas) to financial, technical, extension and marketing services; provide access to and control of land, appropriate infrastructure and technology in order to increase women's incomes and promote household food security, especially in rural areas and, where appropriate, encourage the development of producer-owned, market-based cooperatives (Platform for Action, para 58 (n));

(c) Adopt measures to ensure that the work of rural women, who continue to play a vital role in providing food security and nutrition and are engaged in agricultural production and enterprises related to farming, fishing and resource management and home-based work, especially in the informal sector, is recognized and valued in order to enhance their economic security, their access to and control over resources and credit schemes, services and benefits, and their empowerment (A/RES/23-3/3, annex, para 94 (e)).

### **Rural women's access to education and health, and capacity-building**

11. Provision of access to health, education and social services, and other basic needs for rural women is also a focus of recommendations on the situation of rural women. Some examples of the scope of these recommendations are provided below.

(a) ... attach greater importance to the improvement of the situation of rural women in their national, regional and global development strategies by, inter alia,

\* investing in and strengthening efforts to meet the basic needs of rural women through capacity-building and human resources development measures and the provision of a safe and reliable water supply, health services, including family planning services, and nutritional programmes as well as education and literacy programmes and social support measures (GA resolution 56/129, para 6 (d));

\* pursuing the political and socio-economic empowerment of rural women by supporting their full and equal participation in decision-making at all levels, including in rural institutions through, inter alia, the provision of training and capacity-building programmes, including legal literacy (GA resolution 56/129, para 6 (e));

(b) In cooperation with the government and private sectors, participate in the development of a comprehensive national strategy for improving health, education and social services so that girls and women of all ages living in poverty have full access to such services; seek funding to secure access to services with a gender perspective and to extend those services in order to reach the rural and remote areas that are not covered by government institutions (Platform for Action, para. 60 (d)).

### **Rural women and environment**

12. Rural women's role as environmental managers and as key actors in achieving the sustainable development is covered in a number of recommendations. Some examples are provided below.

(a) Take measures to integrate a gender perspective in the design and implementation of, among other things, environmentally sound and sustainable resource management mechanisms, production techniques and infrastructure development in rural and urban areas (Platform for Action, para. 253 (e));

(b) Integrate rural women's traditional knowledge and practices of sustainable resource use and management in the development of environmental management and extension programmes (Platform for Action, para. 256 (d));

(c) Promote knowledge of and sponsor research on the role of women, particularly rural and indigenous women, in food gathering and production, soil conservation, irrigation, watershed management sanitation, coastal zone and marine resource management, integrated pest management, land-use planning, forest conservation and community forestry, fisheries, natural disaster prevention, and new and renewable sources of energy, focusing particularly on indigenous women's knowledge and experience (Platform for Action, para. 256 (f)).