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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 [74/126](#), the present report provides a review of the activities undertaken by Member States and United Nations entities to enable women and girls in rural areas, especially the poorest and most marginalized, to improve their livelihoods, well-being and resilience. Progress in these areas is essential to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to ensure that no women or girls in rural areas are left behind in its implementation, monitoring and results achieved (see Assembly resolution [70/1](#)). Recommendations are provided for consideration by the Assembly.

* [A/76/150](#).



I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [74/126](#) 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-sixth session. The present report provides an assessment of the situation of women and girls in rural areas since the seventy-fourth session, taking into account the significant impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic that have exacerbated prevailing gender inequalities. It highlights the efforts of Member States, the United Nations system and other actors to address challenges facing women and girls in rural areas, especially the poorest and most marginalized, and to enable them to improve their livelihoods, well-being and resilience in the context of multiple crises that threaten to further erode any gains made in previous decades.

2. The present report offers an assessment of national efforts to improve the situation of women and girls in rural areas by: (a) investing in food security and nutrition, with particular reference to the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis; (b) supporting rural and indigenous women's critical contribution to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity; (c) building resilience, in particular of women smallholder farmers, to climate change and environmental degradation; (d) improving social protection, in view of the increased need during the pandemic; (e) eliminating all forms of violence, especially given the shadow pandemic of violence, and providing essential services; and (f) strengthening the collection, analysis and dissemination of sex- and age-disaggregated data and gender statistics. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Assembly.¹

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. It calls on Member States to invest in developing rural areas through sustainable agriculture and fisheries and supporting women farmers, herders and fishers in developing countries, in particular the least developed countries (General Assembly resolution [70/1](#)). 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, 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.

4. The twenty-fifth anniversary review and appraisal of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action² 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, as well as the corresponding need to improve their livelihoods and employment opportunities and outcomes and increase their access to social protection, public services, sustainable infrastructure and productive resources (see [E/CN.6/2020/3](#)).

¹ Submissions were received from 22 Member States (Argentina, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, China, Colombia, El Salvador, France, Ghana, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Mongolia, Peru, Qatar, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Turkmenistan and Zimbabwe) and from six United Nations agencies (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), World Food Programme (WFP) and World Health Organization (WHO)).

² *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women*, Beijing, 4–15 September 1995 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, and annexes I and II.

5. The priority theme of the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2018 put the spotlight on the challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls ([E/CN.6/2018/3](#)). Its agreed conclusions set forth concrete measures for implementation by Member States in order to overcome persistent gender inequalities, discrimination and structural barriers and support the rights, well-being and resilience of rural women and girls (see [E/2018/27](#)).

6. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, calls on States Parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against rural women, specifically in article 14.³ In its general recommendation No. 34 (2016) on the rights of rural women ([CEDAW/C/GC/34](#)), the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women 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's 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 quality plots and the outmigration of men that leaves them to shoulder farming responsibilities on their own. Climate-related resource scarcity also increases their exposure to the risk of violence.

8. More than 3 billion people globally and 80 per cent of the extreme poor live in rural areas, with approximately 2.5 billion relying on agricultural livelihoods.⁴ As a consequence of the economic, health and social fallout of COVID-19, global poverty increased in 2020 for the first time since 1998, with 96 million people falling into extreme poverty in the wake of the pandemic, including 47 million women and girls. The ratio of 118 poor women for every 100 poor men estimated for 2021 could increase to 121 poor women for every 100 poor men by 2030.⁵ Global food insecurity was on the rise before the pandemic, but COVID-19 impacts have led to severe and widespread increases that are expected to continue through 2021 and into 2022, affecting vulnerable households in almost every country, with disproportionate impacts on women and girls.⁶ Almost one third of employed women work in agriculture worldwide, including forestry and fishing, concentrated in time- and labour-intensive, informal and poorly paid activities with little social protection or income security.⁷ The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the huge gaps in social

³ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1249, No. 20378.

⁴ International Food Policy Research Institute, *Global Food Policy Report* (Washington, D.C., 2019).

⁵ UN-Women, "From Insights to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19" (New York, 2020).

⁶ World Bank, "Food Security and COVID-19", brief, 2 July 2021; FAO, IFAD, United Nations Children's Fund, WFP and World Health Organization, "The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2020: transforming food systems for affordable healthy diets" (Rome, 2020); and FAO, "Gendered impacts of COVID-19 and equitable policy responses in agriculture, food security and nutrition", 15 May 2020.

⁷ International Labour Organization, "World Employment Social Outlook. Trends for Women 2017", Geneva, 2017.

protection systems worldwide, particularly for women.⁸ The crisis has amplified existing gender inequalities and exacerbated the effects of climate change and environmental degradation, as well as long-standing policy inattention and lack of investment, on rural women's communities and livelihoods.⁹

9. Even before the COVID-19 crisis hit, rural women and girls were at greater risk of poverty, food insecurity, violence and exclusion¹⁰ because of the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination they face on the basis of age, income, location, marital and head of household status, race/ethnicity, culture, indigenous status, sexual orientation and gender identity, and as women affected by HIV/AIDS, women with disabilities, and women migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons.¹¹ Structural barriers and discriminatory social norms continue to constrain rural women's access to land and productive resources, markets and technologies, undermine their decision-making power and exercise of voice and agency, and compound the effects of COVID-19. Spiralling rates of violence against women and girls associated with COVID-19 lockdowns and mobility restrictions, in what has been referred to as the shadow pandemic of violence, have put rural women and girls even more at risk of experiencing violence, including harmful practices and child marriage,¹² yet less likely to receive the support they need owing to a lack of essential services, legal remedies and justice.¹³ The intensification of women's paid and unpaid care work to cope with the crisis – care for the sick, for children, for the elderly – has been particularly acute in rural areas owing to limited access to social, care and health services and to clean and safe water, sanitation and energy.¹⁴ Moreover, the gender digital divide in rural areas has restricted rural women's and girls' access to distance education, essential services, digital finance and life-saving information during the crisis.¹⁵

10. The diversity of rural women and girls and their particular needs and priorities, which have been thrown into relief during the pandemic, require tailored policy and programmatic responses to enhance their livelihoods, well-being and resilience to present and future crises. Such approaches will be discussed in the sections that follow.

⁸ UN-Women, "The social protection response to COVID-19 has failed women: towards universal gender-responsive social protection systems", think piece, May 2021.

⁹ See [A/74/224](#) for a discussion of these pre-existing conditions for rural women and girls before the COVID-19 crisis.

¹⁰ Virtually every global gender and development indicator with available data showed that rural women lag behind rural men and urban women (see [E/CN.6/2018/3](#)).

¹¹ UN-Women, "Progress of the world's women 2015–2016: transforming economies, realizing rights", New York, 2015.

¹² Pandemic-related delays in programmes to end harmful practices and child marriage were expected to result in an estimated 2 million more cases of female genital mutilation and 13 million more child marriages over the next decade than would otherwise have occurred. UNFPA, "Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on family planning and ending gender-based violence, female genital mutilation and child marriage", 27 April 2020.

¹³ UN-Women, "COVID-19 and violence against women and girls: addressing the shadow pandemic", New York, 2020.

¹⁴ UN-Women, "COVID-19 and the care economy: immediate action and structural transformation for a gender-responsive recovery", New York, 2020.

¹⁵ GSMA, "The mobile gender gap report", London, 2020.

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

A. Investing in food security and nutrition, with particular reference to the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis

11. Member States have reported on initiatives to bolster the food security and nutrition of rural women and girls and their families and communities, many of which also support sustainable agricultural production, processing and distribution as well as more sustainable access to water, forests and other resources critical for food security. Several Member States also took steps to respond to the food security challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in rural areas.

12. In Argentina, the Prohuerta programme, working with family farms and organizations of women and men producers across the country, supported food security and sovereignty through agroecological cultivation and access to healthy food. The Sowing Food Sovereignty programme targeted food self-sufficiency for family farms in tandem with local and regional territorial markets for food processing and distribution, managed by 137 producer groups in 2020, to provide access to safe, affordable and healthy food produced by family farms. The Native Forests and Communities project has improved access to water, which is a critical element of food security in the context of the pandemic, for rural peasant and indigenous households through rainwater harvesting among other means, while the overall project seeks to increase productivity through the implementation of sustainable forest management plans in six northern provinces.

13. Bulgaria is supporting the food security of women and girls in rural areas through community-led local development strategies that also include environmental and climate considerations. Projects submitted by rural women, most of which involve production and processing of agri-food products, are given priority.

14. In China, the National Food Administration and the All-China Women's Federation jointly launched the World Food Day event in Xiamen, which sought to encourage women to become advocates, practitioners and propagators of the "Cherish your food" campaign to reduce food waste. To alleviate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on reducing sales of agricultural products and to support poverty alleviation and food security, e-commerce platforms run by women's organizations have been set up in Guangdong and Zhejiang, with more than 2000 agricultural products from 26 provinces and regions and 86 underdeveloped counties for sale, bringing in an income of 132 million renminbi (\$20 million).

15. In the first semester of 2021, Colombia launched the Women Entrepreneur Fund as part of its COVID-19 response to bolster women's entrepreneurship in the country. In the case of rural women, the priority sectors for funding revolve around food security: avocado, cacao, coffee, unrefined whole cane sugar, cattle and artisanry. The first call for proposals received 5,028 applications, with 43 per cent from rural women.

16. In El Salvador in 2020 and 2021, the Salvadoran Institute for the Advancement of Women distributed health emergency programme food packages nationally to women local leaders, indigenous women, rural women, women heads of household and women maquila workers, among other women. At the same time, subsistence producers, both women and men, received support to strengthen family food self-sufficiency.

17. France has supported the development of the voluntary guidelines of the Committee for World Food Security on gender equality and the empowerment of

women and girls in the context of food security and nutrition. These voluntary guidelines will address, inter alia, the disproportionate impact of the structural causes of hunger on the realization of the right to food for women and girls. France contributes to the empowerment of women and girls in rural areas through its Programmed Food Aid scheme, which aims to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable populations and fight against malnutrition. In 2020, nearly 88 per cent of the financed projects received the score of 1 or 2 – gender equality as a significant or principal objective – as defined by the gender markers of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

18. Through the Food Assistance for Assets initiative, the World Food Programme (WFP) aims to improve the long-term food security of people and their communities. Food-insecure households receive cash or food-based transfers to address their immediate food needs, freeing up their time to build or rehabilitate productive assets and natural resources, reducing risks and the impact of shocks, increasing food productivity and strengthening resilience to natural disasters, while involving women and girls in determining, accessing and managing assets. Each year since 2013, the programme has helped between 10 and 15 million people in more than 50 countries restore hundreds of thousands of hectares of degraded land for productive use, plant thousands of hectares of forests, improve water access by building wells and ponds and receive training in livelihood and agricultural practices. In 2021, over 7.5 million people (3.6 million male and over 3.9 million female) in 49 countries benefited from the initiative.

B. Supporting rural and indigenous women's critical contribution to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity

19. Several Member States have supported gender-responsive programming that both promotes rural and indigenous women's economic empowerment and the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. While most are livelihood projects, some also have important elements that seek to close gender gaps in access to technology and markets and bolster rural women's voice, agency and participation in natural resource management. A few also make the link to COVID-19 response and recovery.

20. Argentina's Native Forests and Communities project supports and promotes participatory land use planning for community territories as well as the activities of indigenous and peasant women related to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, specifically sustainable forest products for self-consumption and income generation.

21. In China, the All-China Women's Federation and the Central Rural Radio and Television School jointly created online training courses to strengthen women farmers' understanding and practice of sustainable agricultural production technologies and promote the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

22. Ghana is implementing the Ghana Shea Landscape Emission Reductions Project, funded by the Green Climate Fund, the Government of Ghana and the private sector, to restore 500,000 hectares of savannah forests and plant 25,000 hectares of shea and other indigenous tree species in degraded forest reserves while promoting investments in the shea value chain and women's empowerment and training communities in forest and fire management. A total of 16 million women across 21 African countries depend on the shea tree for their livelihoods, harvesting and processing shea fruit into kernels and butter for their own consumption and for sale. Shea butter is used for cooking, cosmetics and as a substitute for cocoa butter in chocolate. Worldwide demand has accelerated in the past two decades, leading to

increased pressure on shea parklands and forests, which are also used for firewood and charcoal and cleared for farms and settlements, with 8 million shea trees lost annually in West Africa. Major shortages are anticipated, with severe consequences for women's livelihoods and the shea value chain in addition to the negative impacts on biodiversity and climate. The project is expected to reduce carbon emissions by supporting agroforestry systems in biodiverse landscapes that will sustain women's shea production.

23. In Slovenia, rural settlements are surrounded by agricultural and forest areas with rich fauna and flora, and protected areas cover more than half of Slovene territory. Rural landowners, many of whom are women, play a key role in nature conservation. Slovenia's Rural Development Plan (2013–2020) calls for support for the diversification of farming activities, including through the development of subsidiary on-farm activities that are an important source of income for rural women and business start-up aid for young women farmers to promote and support women in their decision to live in the countryside. The Plan has three priorities, the first of which (restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry), places roughly one third of Slovenian farmland under funded contracts to improve biodiversity and water and soil management.

24. France has set up a 120 million euro (€) fund to support women's organizations, of which a €5 million call for projects in 2021 supports, inter alia, the sustainable management of natural resources and biodiversity, agroecology, agroforestry, family farming and sustainable fisheries, and rural development and women's empowerment.

25. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Brazilian Cooperation Agency and seven partner countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region are jointly implementing the +Cotton Project to promote the sustainable development of the cotton value chain and expand the rights and economic empowerment of rural and indigenous women and girls in the cotton sector, notably in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the form of native cotton varieties. Project interventions have helped to reduce the gender gap in access to technology by developing a prototype technology for carding, spinning and processing of cotton fibre for the women artisans of Aguachica in Colombia. This was replicated in Bolivia for the use of indigenous women artisans from Charagua and Pailón, which has allowed the improvement of yarn and handicraft production and the reduction of spinning time, while contributing to the preservation of native cotton varieties that also have significant cultural value. During 2020, the project helped to establish a regional network of women working with cotton, including producers, artisans, technicians, designers and decision makers, to highlight and promote the importance of women's roles in the sector and promote initiatives for women's economic empowerment. A regional course for women cotton artisans will be launched in July 2021 to support economic reactivation in the aftermath of COVID-19.

26. With funding from the Global Environment Facility, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) seeks to protect biodiversity and strengthen management of the Greater Kafue and West Lunga national parks in Zambia, with gender mainstreaming being a key element. Gender parity is required in local governance committees that manage forests, and women make up half of the members of village action groups, including executive positions with decision-making authority on community-led activities for sustainable land management.

C. Building resilience, in particular of women smallholder farmers, to climate change and environmental degradation

27. Member States are supporting the resilience and adaptive capacities of rural women and girls to respond to environmental degradation and the adverse effects of climate change.¹⁶ Ensuring rural women's and girls' voice, agency and participation in decision-making on climate and environmental issues is essential for enabling their livelihoods, well-being and resilience and that of their communities. The resilience that such initiatives aim to build – often through innovative solutions involving sustainable energy and digital technology – should have some lasting effects to better equip women and girls in rural areas to face multiplying shocks and crises, now and in the future.

28. In France, the French Development Agency will launch a call for “gender and climate” projects in 2021, for a total of €5 million, to support women's civil society organizations in French international cooperation partner countries to promote gender equality and combat climate change. The Agency's Adapt'Action Facility mobilizes rural women to identify their vulnerabilities and the corresponding solutions to be deployed, promotes targeted and inclusive adaptation measures and helps women to be agents of their own resilience in the Dominican Republic, Madagascar, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Guinea and the Indian Ocean area.

29. Qatar is working at the international level to strengthen the rights and empowerment of rural women. In December 2020, the Qatar Fund for Development signed a contribution agreement with the International Fund for Agricultural Development to support the Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme, with the aim of reducing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the repercussions of climate change on smallholder farmers, especially women living in rural areas of developing countries.

30. The Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women, jointly implemented by FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, UN-Women and WFP in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, the Niger and Rwanda, has strengthened the resilience of some 65,000 rural women and 15,000 men, helped increase and diversify food production, improved nutrition outcomes for their families and communities, and increased incomes and savings. The programme has facilitated access to assets for rural women farmer cooperatives and self-help groups and the adoption of environment- and climate-adaptive infrastructure and technology. The programme was able to respond to the impacts of COVID-19 by switching to remote implementation methodologies, including online training for participants. Participants were able to largely withstand the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic by adapting their micro-enterprises, for example, by diversifying the mode of sales or products, and through access to savings and credit and established links with local government.

31. In 2020, as part of a rural resilience program in Yemen, UNDP, together with partners, supported 700 women in setting up and managing microgrids, empowering them to get jobs and participate in community decision-making. Connectivity to microgrids improved access to clean energy for 10,000 people. In Uzbekistan, UNDP, with financing from the Global Environment Facility, piloted a green mortgage scheme in five regions of the country in collaboration with a local bank. From 2019 to 2020, the scheme issued 1,329 mortgages for affordable low-carbon rural houses

¹⁶ See [A/74/224](#) for additional examples of Member State support for building the resilience of rural women and girls.

that are equipped with rooftop photovoltaics for electricity generation. Women were the majority of mortgage borrowers, holding 67 per cent of all loans. With UNDP support and Global Environment Facility financing, more rural women in Peru became part of the energy sector thanks to eMujer, a new woman's energy school that trains women living in rural areas in the installation, use and maintenance of clean energy technology devices and the creation of small enterprises that offer sustainable energy products and services.

32. The joint United Nations Environment Programme – UN-Women programme in Asia and the Pacific, entitled “EmPower: Women for Climate-Resilient Societies” (2018–2022) aims to build women's resilience in one of the regions most vulnerable to climate change, with a particular focus on Bangladesh, Cambodia and Viet Nam. Working with government and civil society, the programme has supported engendering and implementing climate change policies, piloted the collection of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics at the household level on impacts of climate change, and built the capacity and access to funding of women's renewable energy enterprises as part of the green recovery. In addition to work on the ground with women in their communities and with policymakers in the three countries, the programme has produced a number of innovative knowledge products and policy guidance documents, including “Climate change, gender equality and human rights in Asia” (2020), “Gender and climate change in the context of COVID-19” (2020) and “Gender integration in renewable energy policy – a guideline for renewable energy policy and decision makers” (2020).

33. The UN-Women flagship programme initiative on climate-resilient agriculture has developed most notably across more than 15 countries in sub-Saharan Africa and is implemented through a multi-stakeholder partnership that includes United Nations agencies, governments, financial institutions, civil society organizations and women's producer associations and farmer cooperatives. The initiative has built the climate resilience of 50,000 women farmers and their communities through programmatic action and policy advocacy and reform to reduce the carbon footprint of the agricultural sector. It has improved the capacity of women farmers to adapt to climate change by shifting to agroecological techniques and incorporating renewable and energy-efficient technologies and is increasing women's access to land, finance and markets. To support these and other efforts, UN-Women and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published the second edition of the report entitled “Realizing women's rights to land and other productive resources” (2020).

34. The WFP flagship R4 Rural Resilience Initiative for integrated climate risk management aims to improve the situation of women and girls in rural areas by enabling them to strengthen family income and food security through access to disaster risk reduction, financial savings and climate insurance services, and promotes their equal access to resources and equal voice in decision making. During 2020 and 2021, R4 has allowed nearly 180,000 farmers, of whom 55 per cent were women, to access index insurance products and complementary risk management services in 10 countries. Over a decade of programme implementation shows that it is having a positive impact on women's decision-making and financial autonomy, with women playing an integral role in determining how to allocate the insurance pay-outs received. In 2020, R4 supported 85,000 farmers, of whom 70 per cent were women, in village savings and lending groups, to accumulate modest savings and access small loans to safeguard and diversify livelihoods, engage in income-generating activities and better absorb shocks.

D. Improving social protection in view of the increased need during the pandemic

35. While the social protection response to the pandemic has perhaps been unprecedented,¹⁷ many countries have not yet recovered from the 2008 financial crisis and austerity measures that limited investment in social protection and public services. Almost 70 per cent of the global population was not protected by comprehensive social protection systems at the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, with women lagging behind men.¹⁸ The UNDP–UN-Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker analysed 3,112 measures taken across 219 countries and territories and determined that, by March 2021, 187 countries had taken some 1,300 measures that could be considered gender sensitive. Social protection makes up more than half of the measures that target women's economic security (153 out of 287), of which cash transfers (68 measures in 55 countries) – most with an average duration of 3.3 months – and food aid (39 measures in 32 countries) were the most common. However, the overall response fell far short of what was required to forestall increased poverty and food insecurity. While specific coverage of rural women and girls cannot yet be discerned, the gaps point to the need for universal social protection floors that will better protect everyone in advance of the next emergency.

36. Member States reported steps to increase social protection and health coverage for rural women and girls in response to the economic, social and health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

37. In El Salvador, the employment support project for 2017–2021 has provided rural women with minimal-interest small loans and non-financial assistance and training. The project also backs local initiatives to support sustainable employment for single mothers and provided assistance to 77,932 self-employed women who met the relevant criteria, with 6-month social insurance payments covering April to September 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.

38. France launched a €1.2 billion initiative in 2020, entitled “COVID-19 – health in common”, as part of its global COVID-19 response. The initiative covers social protection measures and strengthens women's access to basic social services, with a focus on Africa. France has also set up a €15 million call for projects to promote sexual and reproductive rights and health, taking into account the effects of the pandemic.

39. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the COVID-19 Emergency Response Project has been aimed at building the socioeconomic resilience of rural and nomadic women, especially women-headed households, by providing health packages, training by local rural women facilitators and financial assistance to support businesses affected by lockdowns.

40. As part of the COVID-19 response of Mongolia, the Child Money Programme was expanded for nine months in 2020 and benefits raised from the pre-COVID-19 level of 20,000 Tugriks (\$7) to 100,000 Tugriks (\$35) per month, reaching 1.2 million children, which has been of critical importance for rural families. The approved 2021 national budget proposes to continue this top-up until July 2021 in order to help families overcome the financial hardships caused by the pandemic. The Government's action plan for 2020–2024 intends to make public services more accessible, transparent and faster by providing labour and social welfare services, including

¹⁷ International Food Policy Research Institute, *Global Food Policy Report 2021. Transforming Food Systems After COVID-19* (Washington, D.C., 2021).

¹⁸ UN-Women, “The social protection response to COVID-19 has failed women. Towards universal gender-responsive social protection systems”, think piece, May 2021.

pensions, childcare benefits, assistance to the elderly and single parents, in digital form and fully online.

41. Peru provides 200 soles (\$50) monthly to children and adolescents who have lost one or both parents to COVID-19, made available digitally or, in rural and remote areas without internet access, through local agencies.

42. Slovakia, in its social services strategy and national priorities for 2021–2030, notes that social protection is essential for the social inclusion of women and disadvantaged groups in rural areas, and in particular children, the elderly, people with disabilities and the unemployed rural population.

43. In Slovenia, in response to COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021, older women farmers in rural areas who meet eligibility criteria may receive a one-off solidarity allowance.

44. The Syrian Arab Republic has employed rural development centres to provide integrated services for the social empowerment of rural women (reproductive health, primary health care, psychosocial support, case management, children's nurseries, educational services, legal education and consultations, training in computer use and other training programmes), which partially continued during the pandemic with an emphasis on awareness-raising about the spread and prevention of COVID-19. Cash assistance programmes focused on rural areas, giving priority to women who support families.

45. Thailand provides shelters, food and medical care nationwide for vulnerable groups affected by COVID-19 such as homeless and unemployed persons, including women and girls in rural areas. The Women and Family Development Learning Centres in eight provinces support women, including single mothers, to develop skills and knowledge to build a stable life after COVID-19, including through vocational training courses and occupational funds. A debt suspension scheme was also launched to assist women who are members of the National Women's Development Fund, which is a revolving fund to support women's economic opportunities and development.

46. In Turkmenistan, the project on improving the system of social protection through the introduction of inclusive quality community-based social services, funded by the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund, seeks to design a new model of inclusive community-based services for children at risk of separation from parents, children without parental care, children with disabilities, youth at risk, women facing gender-based violence, people with disabilities and older persons in need of support with basic everyday care.

47. Zimbabwe established the Women's Micro-Finance Bank with the objective of improving women's access to affordable capital and operational finance and facilitating financial inclusion by decentralizing the banking system to make it accessible to the majority of women who reside in rural or remote areas and work in the informal economy. Between August 2018 and 30 November 2019, a total of 75,451 bank accounts were opened by women, mostly in rural areas, and a total of 46,979 loans disbursed to women.

48. The FAO toolkit on promoting gender-sensitive social protection programmes to combat rural poverty and hunger supports practitioners in applying a gender lens to social protection programmes for rural populations, such as cash transfers and public works, and covers programme design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. The toolkit is available in English, French and Spanish to facilitate its application in diverse contexts with local adaptations.

49. The International Telecommunication Union's Smart Villages project is being piloted in the Niger and aims to connect remote rural communities and establish a

multi-functional and sustainable digital platform that can simultaneously support the provision of multiple gender-specific tools and services with the potential to digitally transform the lives of rural girls and women. In the Niger, where two thirds of women do not receive sufficient medical supervision during pregnancy, the project is deploying a mobile messaging service to deliver targeted preventive health care and nutrition advice to young mothers and pregnant women in the form of free text or short voice messages, as well as a telemedicine solution in rural community health centres that would allow general health practitioners to consult specialists from hospitals and provide a more qualified and accurate diagnosis to female patients.

E. Eliminating all forms of violence, especially given the shadow pandemic of violence, and providing essential services

50. According to the UNDP–UN-Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, most gender-sensitive measures taken by governments address the shadow pandemic of violence against women and girls (832, across 149 countries). Yet COVID-19 mobility restrictions and lack of public transport, coupled with the redirection of health services to containing the virus, have made it especially difficult for women and girls in isolated rural areas to access essential services. Member States have made important efforts to reach rural women and girls.

51. Bosnia and Herzegovina ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, also referred to as the Istanbul Convention, in 2013 and has implemented strategies and policies to prevent and eliminate domestic violence against women. Since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, the country's Agency for Gender Equality has made recommendations to all relevant institutions, including civil society organizations, line ministries and crisis teams to incorporate a gender perspective in all measures, including preventing and eliminating domestic violence against women, and has taken steps to strengthen their capacities to respond to an increase in violence and maintain necessary services during the pandemic.

52. Bulgaria has increased the number of crisis centres that provide accommodation and services for victims and survivors of violence – from 13 in March 2020 to 27 in March 2021 – and specialized units that provide temporary accommodation for pregnant women and mothers with children facing domestic or other forms of violence.

53. In El Salvador, on International Women's Day 2021, the Salvadoran Institute for the Advancement of Women launched a virtual service platform for women in situations of violence, as part of its COVID-19 response, that provides guidance, psychosocial counselling and legal advice. Women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) people can use any mobile device to speak confidentially and at no charge to a specialist; all conversations are automatically erased and leave no digital trace on the device.

54. The Islamic Republic of Iran made several websites and hotlines available to rural and non-rural women and girls at risk of or who are victims or survivors of violence during the pandemic. Thousands of expert facilitators, including doctors, nurses, psychologists and legal advisors, provide social and psychological services, legal consultations and interventions.

55. Kyrgyzstan distributed more than 50,000 information booklets and posters for women on support services and safety precautions; organized online and in-person consultations at crisis centres throughout the country for victims and survivors of domestic violence and launched a social protection hotline in January 2021 to provide

prompt and trained response to domestic violence, including social, legal and psychological support, and collect information and feedback from users to inform policies and programmes.

56. In December 2020, the Lebanese Parliament approved amendments to the Law on the Protection of Women and All Family Members from Familial Violence (law No. 293/2014) towards more effective protection of victims and survivors of violence, and approved a law to criminalize sexual harassment, rehabilitate victims and ensure their reintegration into the community.

57. In January 2021, Mongolia introduced a system of legal and psychological counselling and social protection services for victims and survivors of domestic violence.

58. In May 2020, Romania launched the Bright Sky App, a free digital tool for victims and survivors of domestic violence available in Romanian, English and Hungarian, providing assistance and information, including a database of support services, advice related to consent in sexual relationships and harassment, case studies of the different abusive behaviours most frequently found in intimate relationships, and a facility to record incidents of violence in a confidential digital diary with text, audio, video and photo content that can serve as evidence in court.

59. In 2019 and 2020, UNDP supported support over 80 countries in efforts to address gender-based violence, including through integrating a gender-based violence lens into COVID-19 interventions. For example, UNDP used digital technologies to reach victims and survivors during lockdowns, including those in rural settings, and launched mobile apps in Mauritius, Montenegro and Uzbekistan that provide safe access to services and legal, psychological and medical support. In Indonesia, UNDP worked with government partners at the local and national levels to strengthen referral mechanisms and help to ensure that women and girls in remote villages in the Papua province had access to services.

60. The Spotlight Initiative is a global partnership between the European Union and the United Nations to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Pacific. In 2020, over 650,000 women and girls received gender-based violence essential services despite COVID-19 constraints and lockdowns. To help overcome the difficulties that rural women and girls encounter in accessing essential services, the Spotlight Initiative has supported, for example, six mobile women's centres in Belize, which travel to remote communities offering free sexual and reproductive health services, legal advice, psychosocial support and information on gender-based violence at a single location and make referrals for longer-term care.

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

61. Although significant gaps exist in the data and statistics available on rural women and girls, Member States report some progress despite the disruptions to statistical operations caused by COVID-19. Sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics are fundamental to elaborate gender-responsive sustainable development policies, programmes and strategies and to understand better rural women's and girls' social and economic contributions, including to food security, livelihoods, biodiversity conservation, and environmental and climate resilience, as well as their needs and priorities related to social protection, public services, infrastructure provision and gender-based violence. Some countries are continuing to collect time-

use data that will help to assess the disproportionate share of unpaid domestic and care work performed by rural women and girls, among other issues.

62. Colombia convened rural women's organizations to assess the impact of COVID-19 on rural women's economic empowerment, health, knowledge of and access to information and communication technologies and access to government programmes and financial assistance. Among the data and information needs prioritized were the identification of rural areas without internet access and potable water and verification of lists of rural women who have not benefited from national social programmes.

63. In El Salvador, the Gender Statistics Observatory publishes, among other reports, periodic bulletins on gender statistics covering women in rural and urban areas (the most recent of which is from 2019) and on violence against women across the country (the most recent of which is from January to June 2020).

64. France, through the French Development Agency, is supporting a project on gender statistics in Senegal in 2021 as part of the UN-Women "Making every woman and girl count" initiative, which will undertake sectoral and thematic studies to measure progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 5.

65. In Lebanon, the Ministry of Displaced Persons sent out an electronic questionnaire regarding rural and local development to all municipalities in Lebanon, of which 87.9 per cent had responded by 11 May 2021. That data will form the basis of a situational analysis of women in rural areas.

66. Mongolia has integrating questions related to gender in its livestock census to collect data on and assess women herders' situations and needs. In addition, a pilot survey was conducted in Bulgan province to identify the activities of women and men herders, including time spent on household chores, and to assess their role in decision-making, which should serve as a baseline for future studies.

67. The web portal of Peru's programme for the prevention and eradication of violence against women and members of the family group makes available up-to-date compilations and bulletins on a periodic basis that provide sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics on economic, psychological, physical and sexual violence against women, men, girls, boys, including for rural areas, to respond to the rising demand for information on these topics.

68. Spain is currently updating the 2011 study of gender equality in rural areas, which contains information on the sociodemographic situation and gender inequalities in rural areas, including in the world of work and time use, as well as conducting studies to obtain and generate adequate sex-disaggregated statistical information on women in rural areas and the agricultural sector as a tool for decision-making.

69. Turkmenistan conducted a survey on the health and status of women in the family in 2020, the results of which have been consolidated and are currently being analysed and should serve to help review the indicators for Goal 5.

70. In March 2020, FAO reported data for the first time on two gender-sensitive Sustainable Development Goal indicators for which it is the custodian, 5.a.1 and 5.a.2, which capture information on women's rights to and ownership of land. Since then, FAO has accelerated capacity development efforts for both indicators and was able to report data for 10 countries on 5.a.1 and 16 countries for 5.a.2 for the 2020 annual reporting cycle. FAO also submitted for the first time the entire dataset with country, regional and global data, disaggregated by sex, on indicator 2.1.2 on food insecurity, which allowed for describing differences between men and women in the ability to access food.

71. The World Health Organization (WHO) Health Equity Monitor permits the disaggregation of multiple sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health indicators to capture inequalities experienced by rural women and adolescent girls. This provides evidence on who is being left behind and informs health policies, programmes and practices that seek to close existing gender and other gaps and achieve health equity. WHO is using the Multidimensional Poverty Index and the primary health care monitoring framework to explore rural health inequities and key aspects of health systems performance to better meet the needs of the rural poor in reforms towards universal health coverage. During 2021, WHO is advancing work on the normative basis for equity-oriented rural proofing of national health policies, strategies, plans and programmes.

III. Conclusions and recommendations

72. Member States have undertaken to improve the situation of women and girls in rural areas in a global context in which the economic, social and health repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic have compounded the environmental and climate crises, worsened poverty and food insecurity, and deepened gender inequalities. The magnitude of the current complex of crises coupled with entrenched gender inequalities means that integrated gender-responsive rural development approaches that weave together rural women's and girls' livelihoods, well-being and resilience may have better chances of lasting results if they are undergirded by comprehensive social protection systems and access to sustainable, affordable and safe infrastructure and public services, all of which are lacking in most countries.¹⁹

73. Member States have supported projects that mainstream gender equality considerations and rural women's empowerment, voice, agency and participation to improve livelihoods, food security, biodiversity conservation and natural resource management, and climate and environmental resilience, many integrating several or all of these aspects. Several countries were able to overcome COVID-19 constraints to respond to the shadow pandemic of violence against women and girls, deploying in some cases mobile transport and mobile digital solutions to reach women and girls in remote, rural locations. However, the consolidation of sex- and age-disaggregated data and gender statistics on all of the themes covered in the present report remains piecemeal at best. While some progress has been reported, increased policy attention and financial investment are needed to attain adequate levels of both quantitative and qualitative assessments of the situation of rural women and girls to inform policies and action that will bring about tangible improvements.

74. 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 to sustainable rural development, gender equality and the realization of rural women's and girls' human rights, in particular 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 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;

¹⁹ See also [E/CN.6/2019/3](#).

- (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 of rural women and girls, including women farmers, fishers and agricultural workers, in sustainable agricultural and rural development strategies, policies and programmes;**
- (d) Ensure rural women's full participation and decision-making at all levels in agricultural and rural development and environmental, climate and natural resource governance;**
- (e) Take decisive action to eliminate the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and violence facing rural women and girls;**
- (f) Take the measures necessary to stem the shadow pandemic of violence against women and girls by ensuring access to essential services, legal remedies and justice in rural areas;**
- (g) Enact and implement policies to eradicate poverty and support food security and nutrition, sustainable livelihoods, decent work and income security in rural areas to enhance the well-being and resilience of rural women and girls;**
- (h) Strengthen the resilience and adaptive capacity of all rural women and girls to respond to and recover from economic, social, environmental and health shocks and crises;**
- (i) Develop and adopt gender-responsive strategies to support the resilience and capacities of rural women and girls to respond to the adverse impacts of climate change and environmental degradation;**
- (j) Build the resilience of rural women and girls, and women smallholder farmers in particular, to climate change and environmental degradation by facilitating ancestral, indigenous and modern technological practices and knowledge, and strengthening access to extension services, information and training;**
- (k) Promote the roles of rural and indigenous women and girls in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, including agrobiodiversity;**
- (l) Promote rural women's capacities, skills, knowledge and their access to technology, information and markets to engage in climate-resilient agricultural production, agroecology and sustainable natural resource management;**
- (m) Ensure rural women's full and equal rights and access to land and tenure security and natural and productive resources designing, reforming and enforcing relevant laws and policies;**
- (n) Invest in sustainable infrastructure and technology, including safe, clean and affordable water, sanitation, energy and transport, for all rural women and girls and their communities, including as a means to reduce their disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work;**
- (o) Support rural women and girls by facilitating information and communications technologies to access education, training, finance, insurance and climate and market information;**
- (p) Work towards gender-responsive universal social protection systems, including floors, that ensure the income security of rural women and girls across their life course;**

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

(r) Extend comprehensive social protection systems to all rural women and girls, especially to women in informal employment;

(s) Ensure that rural women and girls who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination enjoy equal access to social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure to eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities;

(t) Strengthen as a priority the capacities of national statistical offices, rural development agencies, civil society organizations and other stakeholders to assess the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural women and girls and to deploy this data and information to inform policies and programmes to address and alleviate these impacts;

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

(v) 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, including through agricultural censuses, to support policies and action to improve the situation of rural women and girls and monitor and track the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

75. The United Nations system and other international organizations, while supporting the empowerment of rural women and girls in their programmes and strategies, are encouraged to support Member States in implementing, measuring and monitoring the foregoing recommendations at all levels.