



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
13 December 2017

Original: English

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### Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-second session

12–23 March 2018

Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”

### Statement submitted by Rural Development Leadership Network, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

There are approximately 500 million poor rural women in the world, comprising about one fourth of all the women. Of these, approximately 4.2 million poor rural women live in the United States. While urban poverty is more widely known, the rates of poverty in non-metropolitan areas are actually higher than those in urban places.

A growing number of U.S. rural women own small farms. Many work as farmworkers on the farms of other owners, many on corporate farms where they are subject to exploitation by employers in terms of wages, benefits and in most states the lack of a legal right to organize. They may have farming skills, but lack access to land. Increasingly, their income comes from non-farm sources, yet employers have closed plants and laid workers off, and there are fewer options available.

As in developing countries, self-employment and microenterprise appear to provide a path to self-sufficiency. The internet holds great promise for rural economic development, entrepreneurship and job creation, but broadband is not sufficiently available or dependable yet to fulfil this promise.

A disproportionate number of families in persistently poor rural areas in the U.S. are people of colour or otherwise historically oppressed. Resources from their areas have often been extracted by outside interests, without fair compensation. Local governments tend to be understaffed and under-funded. Models of development are relatively few. Access to healthcare is often inadequate because of distance to providers. Public transportation is rarely available. Rural women are especially vulnerable to domestic violence because of their economic and social status and comparative isolation. Educational attainment among rural women is lower than among the general population. The increasing proportion of elderly women in rural areas, combined with the tendency of the young to leave, poses a looming challenge.

Among the strengths of rural places are their natural endowments, the ability to grow food, relatively strong family and cultural traditions, as well as the talents of its people.

The Platform for Action recognizes the extent of poverty in the developing world and in pockets of poverty in developed countries, succinctly summarizing some of its causes:

Women's poverty is directly related to the absence of economic opportunities and autonomy, lack of access to economic resources, including credit, land ownership and inheritance, lack of access to education and support services and their minimal participation in the decision-making process. Poverty can also force women into situations in which they are vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

The Platform notes the disproportionate burdens rural women bear. Because of their distance from centres of power, media, money, and influence, the concerns of rural women are often not included on the agendas of decision-making bodies. The theme of CSW62, like that of CSW56, is a positive step in recognizing the concerns of poor rural women worldwide.

In order to fulfil the potential of this theme and to meet the CSW recommendation that women be represented in the decision-making bodies that affect them, it is important that more poor rural women be present at CSW62 and at future CSW sessions, including women from pockets of poverty in developed countries. The professional and academic women who predominate at meetings perform important work as allies of the poor. But the empowerment of poor rural women will be realized

more fully when they have a seat at the table. Their role in poverty and hunger eradication will be enhanced. Their recommendations for development and current challenges will be heard. They are leaders in their communities and deserve the same chance as others to meet with peers from around the world, share experiences and strategies, and advocate for themselves and the causes they believe in. We recommend that member states make this possible by giving financial support for the participation in CSW sessions by poor rural women from their countries and that voluntary groups and NGO's working with the United Nations do the same.

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