

THEMATIC GROUP ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

(GTDFVS)

HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE

(MDH)

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
On the occasion of the General Discussion on Rural Women**

**Situation of Rural women in DRC
Presented by the Thematic Group for Women's Rights and Sexual Violence:
Human Rights House**

September 2013

Kinshasa, DRC

Introduction

On the occasion of the General Discussion regarding Rural Women of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (30 September 2013 to 18 October 2013), the Thematic Group on Women's Rights and Sexual Violence – Human Rights House (GTDFVS - MDH) has prepared this report on the situation of rural women in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The GTDFVS is a coalition of 34 Congolese NGOs working for the rights of women and girls in the DRC. Established in 2009, the GTDFVS monitors and reports on the situation of women to advocate nationally and international for the promotion and protection of their rights.

Despite the concerted efforts of the Congolese government to reduce gender-based discrimination in conformity with international human rights instruments, most notably the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDEW), gender inequality remains a critical issue. In particular, rural women experience high levels of discrimination, compounded by their economic and social vulnerability.

I. Poor involvement of rural women in the implementation of development programs

Women living in rural areas play a principle role in the agricultural sector of the DRC. They represent 70% of rural farmers.¹ They are working more than men; 76.7% of women work compared to 63.4% of men.² However, they have limited involvement in the implementation of development programs.

The Government has put in place a rural development policy, implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development with the support of technical and financial partners. Since 2002, the following projects and programs have been put in place: Emergency Multi-sectorial Programme for Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (PMURR), Support Project for the Rehabilitation of the Agricultural and Rural Sector (PARSAR), Program for Agricultural Recovery in Province Orientale (PRAPO), Support Programme for Community Development Initiatives (PAIDECO) and Support Programme for Agricultural Recovery in Equateur Province (PRAPE).

The aforementioned programs have not substantially improved the condition of rural women; in particular women have not been substantially involved in the decision-making process, as recommended by the Article 14 of CEDAW.

In their National Gender report (2011) the Government underlined that only 43% of economic policies had been implemented.³ This is due in part to the fact that there are no functional monitoring and evaluation systems to ensue that the aforementioned programs are being actualized. Additionally, policies related to food security and poverty reduction are not adequately financed, making implementation difficult.⁴

¹ Ministry of Gender, Family, and Child. *Rapport National Genre*. p.98

² Ibid, p.32.

³ Ibid, p. 108

⁴ Ministry of Planning, National Institute of Statistics (Kinshasa : Mai 2011) *Enquête par grappes à indicateurs multiples MICS-RDC 2010, rapport final*. p. 124.

The existing policies are not sufficiently responding to some of the critical concerns of rural women, including:

1. **Social and cultural discrimination:** Many of the difficulties encountered by rural women are based in discriminatory socio-cultural traditions.⁵ For example, in the provinces of Maniema, Kasai Oriental and Kasai Occidental, according to local customs women do not have access to land because all acquired assets and resources becomes the property of the men in her family. If a woman is married, her husband manages all of her earnings. Notably, in Maniema province there is a proverb that says, “When a woman kills an elephant, the tusks belong to her husband”.

2. **Illiteracy and poor access to information:** Rural women in the DRC are often illiterate and have poor access to information, particularly regarding good practice in agriculture.⁶ There are insufficient programs and finances focused on building women’s capacity in environmental management, conservation of the environment, and the protection of biodiversity. Many women simply do not have the necessary information to improve their agricultural techniques. Additionally, rural women suffer from a lack of mechanical farm equipment.

3. **Violence Against Women:** Rural women are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence. The massive influx of refugees from North Kivu and South Kivu, among which there are armed groups, and the proliferation of artisanal mining sites have resulted in increased violence. This is particularly concerning because of women’s limited access to functional justice services.⁷ The implementation of the National Strategy for the Fight Against Gender Based Violence has been characterized by the lack of financial means and inadequate infrastructure, meanwhile armed groups are extorting money and resources from rural women to support their war efforts.

II. Difficult access of rural women to economic resources and basic social services

Rural women in the DRC have limited access to economic resources and to basic social services. This is partly due to the fact that rural women have limited involvement in the formulation of relevant policy and the mobilization of resources. An additional factor is that the government has very little disaggregated data or information on the actual situation rural women.

In regard to reproductive health, early motherhood is more common in rural areas among young women with no education and among those living in the poorest areas. Early pregnancy tends to fall between the old and young generations. Contraceptive use is very low in rural areas: 15% of women use contraception in rural areas in contrast to 25% in urban areas. Significant differences were observed between provinces: in Katanga province 9% of women use contraception, in Kinshasa 31% and in Equateur province 29%.⁸ The percentage of women who use contraception doubles between women with no education (13 %) and women who have been education (26%)

⁵ UNDP (2010). *Genre en RDC*. Available at : www.cd.undp.org/info.aspx?idcontent=9;

⁶ Ministry of Gender, Family, and the Child (2011), *Rapport National Genre 2011*, Op. Cit. p. 137

⁷ (3 September 2013) Interview with Zahera Shami (president of Soutien aux Actions des Femmes Indigentes du Maniema - SAFI-Maniema).

⁸ Ministry of Planning, National Institute of Statistics (Kinshasa : Mai 2011) *Enquête par grappes à indicateurs multiples MICS-RDC 2010, rapport final*. p. 124.

and between the poorest (17 %) and the wealthiest women (32%).⁹ This is due to the fact that the government has not developed adequate rural outreach programs to bring behavioural change in reproductive health nor have they made appropriate birth control available in health centres. In addition, health facilities in urban areas are better than those in rural areas.¹⁰

III. Conclusion

CEDAW is dedicated to promoting the principle of equality between men and women; it underlines that discrimination against women violates that principle. Gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in Congolese society. Despite the commitments made through the ratification of international legal instruments, the Government of the DRC has failed to eradicate discrimination against women in general and in particular against rural women in many sectors.

Discrimination against rural women is worsened by:

- Discriminatory cultural practices;
- Low involvement of rural women in development policies and programs;
- Lack of capacity building programs for management and protection of the environment;
- The limited income of rural women;
- The absence of the strategy of gender mainstreaming in policies and programs as well as the law implementing parity.

IV. Recommendations

As such, the group recommends that:

- That the Government ensure the full participation of rural women at all levels in developing development plans;
- That the Government provide capacity building of rural women in the management and protection of the environment;
- That the Government continue implementing the National Strategy of Micro-Finance to encourage economic equal opportunity for women in all sectors;
- That the government provide data disaggregated by sex and information on the situation of rural women.

⁹ Ministry of Planning, National Institute of Statistics (Kinshasa : Mai 2011) *Enquête par grappes à indicateurs multiples MICS-RDC 2010, rapport final*. p. 124.

¹⁰ Ministry of Gender, Family and of the Child (2011), *Rapport National Genre 2011*, Op. Cit. p. 115