

Discussion on Rural Women.

The world is waking to the realisation that sustainable development must be the cornerstone of international policy setting, and that genuine sustainable development means economical and ecological equality. Soroptimist International, as a global voice for women representing over 80,000 individuals around the world, calls upon civil society, governments, and the private sector to ensure that this paradigm shift becomes a reality and not just another point on the ever-growing list of unrealised international commitments.

“Investing in small scale farming, particularly through women, is a vital step towards meeting the challenges of food production in the future. Governments are not living up to their international commitment to protect women from discrimination, as the gap between de jure and de facto discrimination persists. Rural women still find it more difficult to get access to a range of resources such as credit, land, agricultural inputs and extensions, with obvious consequences for their food security. Land ownership is a particular issue for women.”
(excerpt from statement given on International Women’s Day at the FAO, 2011, by Soroptimist International representative).

Soroptimist International demands that governments commit to the education, empowerment, and enabling of those most affected by ecological and economic degradation and destruction, namely rural women and girls, to meaningfully participate in decision-making and policy setting for the achievement of sustainable development at local, national, and international levels. The Soroptimist International model of educating women and girls by increasing access to skills, empowering women and girls with increased confidence, and enabling opportunities in the wider community to ensure they have choices, has proven to be most effective in the context of rural women’s needs and sustainable development.

With this in mind, Soroptimist International brings the following recommendations to CEDAW as they develop a new general recommendation on rural women and girls, based on first-hand knowledge and experience from our worldwide network of grassroots, community-based clubs in both the Global North and the Global South.

Soroptimist International urges governments, civil society, the private sector, and other relevant partners to:

- Recognise the increasingly important role of women as the primary producers and purchasers of food, and the heretofore lack of adequate protection and support of their rights.
- Ensure that actions taken to empower rural women are systems-based and horizontal, rather than project-based and vertical.
- End any and all approaches, activities, or policies which promulgate the victim/saviour dichotomy and ensure meaningful, respectful, and human rights based approaches to empowerment for rural women and girls.
- Recognise that macro-economic policies, originating from an antiquated and inherently patriarchal hierarchy, tend to discriminate against or ignore the gender-specific needs of women and girls. Development and implementation of appropriate micro-economic policies and programmes, in consultation with those affected, must be actioned to ensure the protection and realisation of the human rights of rural women and girls.
- Implement with urgency policies and programmes which provide rural women and girls with security in the following areas: financial security, employment security, land security, food security, freedom from violence, secure access to education and training, and a secure place in decision-making forums.
- Ensure that policies and programmes take a life-course approach to education and employment for rural women and girls, recognising and understanding that access to learning is a human right at all ages, and that women and girls living in rural areas have different needs at different times in their lives.
- Improve and prioritise appropriately disaggregated and internationally comparable data collection, encompassing process and outcome indicators, which shift away from purely economic factors, such as GDP, to holistically examine development.
- Ensure that traditionally 'female' dominated work in agriculture, farming, and food production is not undervalued or restricted to informal economies,