

**Working Group on the Rights of Peasants and People living in Rural Areas**  
**Second Session, 2<sup>nd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> February 2015**

**Statement**

PWESCR (the Programme on Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), India; SAFA (South Asian Feminist Alliance for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights); CSRC Nepal; ANANDI, India; Women's Action Network, Sri Lanka; Mauj Development Foundations, Pakistan; Fundación Plurales, Argentina; and Colectivo de Mujeres del Chaco Americano, Argentina along with several civil society organizations from the global South welcomes the work of this Working Group on the Rights of Peasants and people living in rural areas. We appreciate the WG's concerns for gender equality by prescribing specific measures for the empowerment of women, including the recognition of the right to own land and inherit land and to have access to bank loans. Through this written contribution, we aim to further provide information about the realities and challenges faced by rural women to realise their human rights, especially economic, social and cultural rights. We request the Working Group to explicitly recognise these rights as central to the overall well-being of rural women belonging to all diversity. We hope that the second session of the WG will consider the following issues and recommendations.

**1. Recognise Rural Women as a Peasant** – a worker, a food producer.

All States in all their development agenda and economic policies should recognise rural women as economic agents, as development agents – as farmers, as workers, as producers, growers, and gatherers. Women in rural areas are mostly involved in agriculture. States should recognise women as farmers and their role in food production and guardians of nature

**2. Rights of Women Peasant**

***Recognise, reduce and redistribute women's unpaid work include care and work in subsistence forms of livelihood:***

All women work - whether paid or unpaid. Women, especially rural women, do a lot of unpaid work within the household and do agriculture work in family farms and enterprises. Despite its obvious economic and social worth, much of the work that women do remains invisible, undervalued, and under-appreciated, and is not included in GDP. Women do most of household, and care work. They spend many hours in collecting water, fuel and fodder, cooking, cleaning, domestic chores, repair and maintenance of house. This work is backbreaking, time-consuming and is not shared by men. It puts an unequal burden on women and prevents them from participating in productive work in the labour market. Lack of infrastructure, poor energy and technology options add to this burden.

**Recommendations:**

- States should recognise, rural women as farmers and workers. States should ensure that there is no discrimination in women's access, ownership, use and control over resource rights.
- States should reduce and redistribute their unpaid work. To reduce women's time burden States should provide basic services – housing, water, sanitation, education, health, fodder, institutionalised child care facilities, energy (including domestic energy for fuel and fodder) and better technology options.
- States should ensure better infrastructure support for rural women's needs to reduce the day-to-day drudgery of providing for themselves and their families. This should include access to markets (labour and goods), internal roads, and transport subsidies to support rural women's mobility.
- State should invest in awareness raising campaigns and promote equal sharing of care and unpaid work between men and women.

**3. Rights to life and Right to an Adequate Standard of Living**

Rural peasant women are the poorest. Women are food insecure, lack basic healthcare, access to education, employment opportunities, have no ownership, management, access and control over productive resources including land for livelihoods, and have little or no access to social security. Rural

women from social and economically marginalised groups continues to face multiple discrimination on the grounds of caste, race, class, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language, literacy, disability, marital status, and age.

#### Recommendations:

- States should address structural causes of poverty of rural women. States should demonstrate how their fiscal policies are pro rural women.
- States should recognise rural women as individual right holders and not just as members of households or dependents of male breadwinners. Rural women should receive entitlements as individuals.
- Women should be engaged in decision-making processes at all levels that impact their lives. Towards this, substantial investments and support needs to be made for supporting rural women's organising and organisations.

#### ***Right to Food:***

Majority of rural women are severely malnourished. Women's health, well-being and nutrition is not given due importance by governments, society, and families. International trade agreements, privatisation and commercialization have led to inflationary food prices while food provisioning by the state is increasingly being withdrawn. This greatly impacts women since the burden of food provisioning within the household is borne by women without having equal access to food. The impact of discrimination against women in food is seen in pervasive and persistent malnutrition amongst women in rural areas. The denials of women's right to adequate food carries on intergenerationally with low birth weight babies and high malnutrition amongst infants.

#### ***Right to Health and Sexual and Reproductive Rights:***

Rural women lack access to sexual and reproductive health care services and information. From early childhood, they are, due to the prevalent son preference syndrome, denied nutritious food and leisure activities which are vital for health and robust growth. They are married early and due to repeated pregnancies and short birth spacing they face chronic malnutrition. They do not have access to antenatal and postnatal care, leading to maternal mortality and morbidity like pelvic organ prolapsed, obstetric fistula and reproductive tract infections. Lack of women-friendly health services, skilled birth attendance, and female medical practitioners in rural area limit access to contraceptives. Unregulated healthcare services lead to lack of accountability of health care providers.

Rural women's sexual and reproductive health and rights are not recognised. Hence, women lack control over their bodies including their sexuality, decision-making in their marriage (age of marriage, choice of partner), when and whether to have or not to have children. Social and cultural norms prescribed by patriarchy control over rural women's bodies and sexuality resulting in limited mobility, brutal violence including honour killing, witch hunting, sex selective abortion, marital rape, domestic violence, child marriage, exchange marriage, dowry, and sexual violence.

One important thing to include as well is access to contraceptives and abortion; women's control over their own bodies. There are hazards to women due to no accessibility of contraceptive and safe abortions.

Honor killing is one of the most harmful patriarchal practices in many countries. More importantly, the government's lack of accountability and lack of serious measures to eliminate honor killing is a concern.

#### ***The Right to Social Security:***

Recognising the multiple forms of vulnerability that rural women face, States should provide comprehensive universal social security to all rural women. This should ensure realisation of adequate standard of living by securing basic rights and essential services including food, health, housing, education, water and sanitation

and also energy, technology, transport at minimum levels. Loss of livelihoods and all forms of violence including domestic violence, sexual violence and conflict, should be criteria to receive social security.

#### Recommendations:

- States should provide comprehensive universal social security to all women. This includes non-contribution based social assistance to ensure social and economic inclusion of marginalised women. Social security benefits should be received by rural women as individual rights holders and not just as a member of a family, household or group. Their marital status should not have an impact on their entitlements.
- Social security should be universal, but not uniform, ensuring specific and multiple vulnerabilities; and special temporary measures for socially and economically excluded groups including single women, female-headed households, migrants and migrant workers; Dalit, tribal; sexual and gender minorities; women with occupational stigma and women in conflict areas.
- Social security should provide protection from the following risks: old age; disability; illness; accident; maternity and unpaid care work; death; all forms of violence and threat of violence including conflict; loss of livelihood and unemployment. States should frame the reproductive and care role that women have as work. If a woman cannot do that work (because she is ill, disabled, etc.), she should get unemployment benefits.
- Poor rural women do not have documents that are generally required to apply for state benefits. Therefore, social security schemes should not require bureaucratic administrative processes that alienate women. Instead, they should strive to be women- friendly in design.
- Information about various schemes and benefits should be given a clear, simple, women-friendly way.
- There must be a State obligation to provide: financial backing for social security as an investment, not a burden; mechanisms for awareness raising and promotion for the organisation of women's collectives; gender sensitisation training of policy makers, bureaucrats and staff at all levels; institutionalised mechanisms for a greater role for women in planning and designing policies; an established, gender sensitive grievance redressal mechanism to take penal action at the local level.

#### ***Right to Education:***

- Rural women have less access to formal schooling and education systems due to various reasons which affects their access to job market and employment opportunities later in life. They usually dropout from school at the secondary level because they are needed at home to do chores or are thought to be of marriageable age. Attacks on girl's schools by extremists also force parents to take them out of schools. School curriculum is not gender-sensitive and perpetuates patriarchy. Lack of sanitary facilities and toilets also hinder girl's education. Additionally, sexual harassment is also a very important factor that prevents girls from accessing education.
- *Informal Education:* Informal education, especially vocational educations such as short training, farmer field training, technical training etc., strengthen rural women's potentials to access productive income generating opportunities. It helps them to enhance their confidence and skills and enables them to negotiate for better conditions. Due to social, religious, and economic restrictions, women do not have enough access to informal education. This includes restrictions in mobility and preferential schooling of boys over girls among others.

#### ***Right to Fair and Just Conditions of Work:***

- There is worldwide recognition that agriculture, together with mining and construction, is a particularly hazardous sector. Women are exposed to serious risks while engaging in agricultural activities - due to exposure to pesticides and other agrochemicals causing poisoning, death or in certain cases work-related cancers. The nature of their work – examples include rice transplanting, prawn peeling, etc - also places them at greater health risks.

- Other hazards are due to the multiple contacts with poisonous animals or plants which may give rise to allergies, respiratory disorders, infections etc.
- With growing industrialisation there has been an increase in the dumping of toxic and hazardous waste into landfills, water bodies etc. Women are more vulnerable to being exposed to contaminated water, adverse effects of the food chain, air pollution, or household products.
- The smoke from burning the biomass in the home is one of the fourth leading causes of death and disease in the world's poorest countries (WHO, 2002). Indoor air pollution (IAP) is linked to the deaths of over 1.6 million people, predominately women and children, each year.
- In many instances, indoor smoke is responsible for acute respiratory infection (ARI), tuberculosis, chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (COPD), child birth complications and vector borne diseases.
- Indoor air pollution is strongly related to poverty, and it is the poor who rely on the low grade fuel and have the least access to cleaner technologies. Moreover, health hazards caused by excessive use of biomass fuel in poorly ventilated kitchens and inefficient stoves for cooking and heating rooms prove fatal.

#### **4. Rights to Means of Agricultural Production or the Right to Livelihoods:**

It is important to note the devastating impacts on rural women's lives and livelihoods as a result of:

- the changing global economic situation;
- globalisation, privatisation, commercialisation, militarisation, fundamentalism, and religious extremism;
- conflicts and disasters, both man-made and natural;
- deeply entrenched feudal and patriarchal norms, values and practices;
- climate unpredictability and other environmental destruction.

Dispossession and change of use in resources have negative impacts on women's livelihoods. From a women's perspective, land is a critical means to begin asserting autonomy over other realms of her lives. Hence land must be viewed as a basic and natural right across gender, class and caste categories for people of all denominations. Rural women's livelihoods are substantially dependent on their access, control, ownership, management and investments in land, forests and water bodies. Land reforms have not been largely carried out in many countries, resulting in land inequalities.

Women continue to be considered a property belonging to men and are given away in marriage, exchanged to settle disputed. Patrilocal culture of marriage forces most women to migrate to their marital home which results in their dispossession from productive resources.

The minor forest produce that women collect are disappearing as the preferred forest policies across several countries is more timber oriented, which result in removal of all nutrition and livelihood needs of women in forests communities.

#### Recommendations:

- States should recognise, promote and protect rural women's right to livelihoods including opportunities for employment (paid work).
- Rural women should have *individual rights* over productive resources (including natural resources) for sustainable livelihoods - irrespective of who they are and where they come from. States should ensure access, ownership, control and management including decision-making power of productive resources

and its outputs. This includes land, water, forests, livestock, credit, energy, technology, knowledge, education, skills.

- Development agendas should recognise that rural women traditionally and historically have skills and knowledge for livelihoods that ensure food security for all.
- Ensure all benefits including agriculture subsidies are received by women equally.
- All State programmes and schemes that have provisions for livelihoods should engage rural women's collectives in this process. For example, the right to education in India provides free, compulsory primary education to all. Under this right India provides free school uniform and mid day meals to all kids. Making of these school uniforms and preparation of mid day meals should be given to rural women's collectives. This would promote rural women's livelihoods.
- Mobility is a challenge for rural women. For instance, unless there is a transportation subsidy, rural women cannot travel to access basic goods and services including education, health, employment, banking etc.
- Research in agriculture should be gender sensitive and based on women peasant needs.

#### **5. The Right to Land and territories (Natural Resources):**

- Rural women's right to land is a human rights issue as her life and livelihood are connected to it. Access to land is not only an issue of land rights but it is recognition of traditional livelihoods, women's work, women's contribution and women's role in development.
- The existing gender differentials in access, ownership and control of land, water and forests require that women's equal legal rights to inheritance are legislated and protected. Further, States should take affirmative action in all public distribution lease of land, water bodies, forest produce to protect and promote women's livelihoods and reach the goals of substantive equality. States may also purchase land from the market and distribute it to landless rural women.
- States should undertake equitable distribution of land and water use to support livelihoods of women peasants and prevent dispossession of resources from peasants to corporations
- Land and property should be either in the woman's name or under joint ownership. Single women including widows should have individual land ownership.
- States should develop gender sensitive land tenure context mapping at all levels.
- Women's group at community level should be provided with collective rights for previously unused or fallow lands.
- States should ensure equal and engaged participation of women in all decision making processes around issues connected to resources including land. States should remove barriers to ensure women's participation in all aspects of local governance and decision making.

#### *Right to Seeds and Traditional Agricultural Knowledge and Practices;*

- Women have indigenous knowledge regarding biodiversity and genes. They play a crucial role in keeping seeds. Genetically modified seeds not only destroy biodiversity but also alienate women as traditional knowledge holders.

#### **6. Right to Information**

- The extreme isolation rural women live because of obsolete mass media, affects their right to be informed. Information about various rights, government schemes and benefits should be provided in a clear, simple, women-friendly way.
- Rural women face digital divide as they have little or no access to new forms of communication including transportation, mobile services, internet services etc. This restricts their access to critical information and makes the invisible in setting agenda. Information regarding State schemes and entitlements should be available to rural women in a gender-friendly manner.
- States should build capacity of rural women to participate in an informed way in all aspects of local governance. Women should be part of all decision-making processes.

- 7. Rural Peasant Women and Markets** *And Freedom to determine price and market for agriculture production*
- Rural women are involved in subsistence forms of food production but they also need access to markets. Women are not just producing for themselves and their families. They also are producing for the markets. Rural women artisans need skill development opportunities, access to credit, and markets.

Recommendations:

- States should ensure equal access and participation in markets– both for labour and goods. Rural women should have opportunities to gain better skills and knowledge to participate in markets equally and for their upward mobility.
- State should monitor and regulate markets to ensure rural women receive fair prices for their products.
- Financial inclusion of rural women is very important: Concept of women-friendly bank with easy administrative processes and mobile banking available to women in remote areas.
- Women's should be provided full and safe access to public spaces (markets, commons).
- Access to credit, loans, subsidies.

**8. Rural Peasant Women and Migration and Conflict:**

- Migration of women is mainly attributed to marriage and to the *patrilocal* form of residence. Integration into their new family and community can be difficult due to linguistic and cultural barriers, economic hardship, different gender norms, weakening of social network and erosion of social capital.
- The impacts of militarization and invasion of multi-national companies in the name of development in developing countries has tremendous negative impact on rural women's lives and livelihoods. This model of development has serious consequences in efforts to rebuild social security and community protection networks and rural women's economies, especially in relation to access to natural resource and fertile land. It has a huge impact upon the bodily security of rural and indigenous women in the long term as it affects their livelihood, takes away their rights (e.g. hills, seas, graze land and forests) making them dependent and often leading to robbing them off of their self-sufficiency and food security. States needs to
- States should ensure internally displaced Women (IDP) displaced from their land are able to return to their original habitat.
- One of the important reasons for women peasants or rural women's migration is attributed to conflicts and post conflicts situation also. The social impact of militarization and invasion of multi-national companies in the name of development in developing countries has resulted into serious consequences, affecting the efforts to rebuild social security and community protection networks and rural women's economies, especially in relation to access to natural resource and fertile land. On the other hand, War displaced women IDPs have been denied the right of return to their original habitat. A large number of locations have been deemed high security zones (HSZ), special economic zones (SEZ) or military bases thus peasant women are denied access to their native lands and livelihoods.
- Women are often forced to deal with migration issues due to conflicts or environment-related circumstances. Women in rural areas, whether they migrate or stay behind as family members of male migrants, are confronted with very specific hardships. They are vulnerable to social and physical aggression, including gender-based violence.
- Women migration is often restrained in movement by caring and reproductive responsibilities. A cultural norm, which is also particularly stringent in rural areas, also dictates that it is not acceptable for women to travel on their own.

- For those living in remote and isolated areas, other obstacles include the lack of proper identity documents and difficulties in accessing transport or information on possibilities of legal and safe migration channels. Since women have fewer agencies to manage their own journey and legal channels of migration are scarce, the potential for exploitation by unscrupulous actors is high.
- Rural women migrants, depending on the context of their migration, may gain more autonomy by improving their social and economic situation. Also, they can send remittances back home, which significantly contribute to the welfare of the families they left behind.
- Considering emotional and physical toll that the current post war/ war developments have placed on peasant women, state should develop a more humanist development model which recognises rural women security.

#### **9. Rural Peasant Women and Political Participation:**

Rural women lack political participation in local-self government, customary councils and state institutions due to patriarchy, lack of mobility restrictions, lack of transport, security concerns, childcare and other care-giving responsibilities. They also face lack of familiarity with policies and rules (due to limited access to formal and informal education, technology). Women also face cultural constraints on their mobility. As politics require women to interact with male and female constituents and address public meetings, the mechanisms of sex segregation are used to restrict their mobility and further political participation.

#### **10. Rural Peasant Women's Access to justice:**

Rural women lack access to justice. This is one of the most important forms of violating the enjoyment of women's human rights. There are many different reasons, including the existence of informal justice systems, unavailability and inefficiency of judicial protection and legal aid; limited numbers of women working in judicial and justice institutions, particularly on decision making; lack of efficient protection mechanisms for victims; illiteracy. States should ensure women-friendly grievance mechanisms and redressal procedures. Rural women should have access to justice. State should ensure that those who violate right of rural women are punished. There should not be a culture of impunity but a culture of accountability.

#### **11. Few More Recommendations:**

- States should provide infrastructure for proper sanitation for rural women. This should include sanitary pads, toilets, etc.
- States should ensure maximum available resources to provide for basic rights for rural women. Budget analysis should be used via a tool to monitor the process. States should ensure gender responsive budgeting in planning, implementation and reporting on the national and sub-national level in spheres of rural women's rights empowerment.
- Accountability and monitoring mechanisms (including desegregated data) with women- friendly grievance redressal system should be put in place.
- States should ensure that policy-makers at the national and local level have access to necessary expertise in order to strengthen gender responsiveness in state legislations and policies. Local non-political leaders should be encouraged to support the promotion of women's economic rights.

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