

# RURAL WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ERA

◆ Priorities, Partnerships, and Policy for  
Transformational Change



HUAIROU COMMISSION  
*Women, Homes & Community*

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FUNDACIÓN GUATEMALA & COORDINADORA  
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# INTRODUCTION:

## TOWARDS PARTNERSHIP- BUILDING AND ADVOCACY

Adopted by consensus by world leaders in September 2015, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* is intended to be a transformational framework that will help to usher in a new era of inclusive and equitable development worldwide. Its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets focus in an action-oriented manner on a wide array of development disparities, addressing and encompassing the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. It is now up to national governments to determine how to implement the 2030 Agenda, which pledges “no one will be left behind” in the process.

For the 2030 Agenda to be truly transformational, this report maintains that organized groups of rural women are a key constituency in assisting national governments to achieve inclusive and gender-equitable results. As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has remarked, “Rural women are the backbone of sustainable livelihoods and provide food security for their families and communities.”<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that rural women represent up to 43% of the agricultural labor force in developing countries, and that approximately one-quarter of the world’s population is comprised of rural women whose livelihoods are sustained by agriculture and natural resources<sup>2</sup>. As such, rural women are knowledge-holding experts with visionary and practical development solutions to ensure food security, conserve natural resources, and counter widespread inequality. Organizing to improve their circumstances, these women are agents of change working to build productive and vibrant rural communities worldwide. Their organizations, at the frontlines of short- and long-term structural challenges, are essential actors in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of development commitments.

During 2015-2016, in partnership with the International

Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Huairou Commission led an effort to support the mobilization of rural women around the 2030 Agenda. Specifically, the objective of the partnership was to catalyze a global rural women’s advocacy and partnership coalition led by grassroots organizations, through which rural leaders could communicate their priorities in relation to the 2030 Agenda and position themselves as a critical constituency to institutions and governments.

Anchored by rural women’s organizations with sizeable constituencies in 19 countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, the partnership came together as the Rural Women’s Empowerment Initiative. Serving as a strategy to incorporate rural women in the development agenda, rural and grassroots women’s organizations were selected to convene national-level, multi-stakeholder dialogues in 4 countries, as well as 14 local consultations in 13 countries (see details in Diagram 1: Matrix of Dialogues). In doing so, the initiative promoted partnership building and policy advocacy to highlight rural women’s roles, contributions, and policy priorities in the context of SDG implementation.

*“How can we make it a mandate of government to include rural women in shaping the SDGs, monitoring progress, and participating in the budgetary process?”*

*–Violet Shivutse, Rural Women Ambassador and Trainer*

<sup>1</sup> UN News Centre. (October 15, 2015). ‘Rural women are the backbone of sustainable livelihoods,’ Ban declares on International Day. Retrieved from: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2015/10/rural-women-are-the-backbone-of-sustainable-livelihoods-ban-declares-on-international-day/>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe (UNRIC). (October 14, 2015). Rural women are critical to the success of the 17 Global Goals. Retrieved from: <http://www.unric.org/en/latest-un-buzz/29913--rural-women-are-critical-to-the-success-of-the-17-global-goals>



To galvanize large constituencies of rural women, the national workshops were convened by organizations well positioned to build broad-based alliances and influence rural development policy. Stakeholders were assembled to develop an action agenda aligned with the priorities of rural communities. In 13 other countries, leaders were consulted at the sub-regional level to “short list” a transformative rural development vision and the action priorities most important to the empowerment of rural women and their families. In doing so, these local consultations outlined enabling factors (i.e. policy opportunities, institutional partnerships, and key civil society allies) to be leveraged and key challenges to be overcome at the local level.

These dialogues principally took place on or around the International Day of Rural Women (15 October), only weeks after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and therefore serving as a timely intervention within their local and national context. Two complementary initiatives were additionally undertaken to support the dialogue process: the Rural Women Ambassadors and Radio Pilots. The Rural Women Ambassadors are seven grassroots leaders who were positioned as champions of rural priorities in strategic global and regional policy arenas. Representing the Huairou Commission and its partners, they participated in policy fora to promote a collective rural development action agenda, and also brought the lessons learned to their home countries for continued advocacy around the SDGs. At a more local level, the Radio Pilots leveraged existing media connections to raise community awareness about the new development agenda and to position rural women as experts within it. Two grassroots women’s organizations that successfully employed radio as a communication tool during their dialogue activities were selected to implement a series of new radio programming and other outreach activities for virtually mobilizing a remote, rural constituency.

Taken together and laid out in this report, the insights from the Rural Women’s Empowerment Initiative represent a rural women’s vision for rural transformation. The sections are dedicated to the three major themes that emerged around rural women’s priorities, followed by conclusions and recommendations:

- The need to formalize rural women’s role in decision-making processes (related to SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 10, 17);
- The extent to which threats and risks due to climate change and natural disasters are creating new levels of vulnerability for rural producers, with a particular burden on women, requiring adaptive action (related to SDGs 2, 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15);
- The marginalization of rural women created by their lack of access to and control over land and natural resources (related to SDGs 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 16).

#### CAMPAINING AT THE NATIONAL DISASTER RISK REDUCTION COMMEMORATION IN SURAKARTA, INDONESIA



DIAGRAM 1: MATRIX OF DIALOGUES

Country	Level of Consultation	Government Participants	Participating Key Partners	Grassroots Participants	
				Women	Men
<b>AFRICA</b>					
<b>Benin</b> Institute of Cultural Affairs	<b>Local</b> Village-level consultations & workshops	Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries; Local government	9 sister NGOs	400	72
<b>Ghana</b> Grassroots Sisterhood Foundation	<b>Local</b> Radio talk shows, dialogue, march	Ministry of Food and Agriculture; Ministry of Gender, Children & Social Protection	National Disaster Management Organization; Savanna Accelerated Development Authority	30	12
<b>Kenya</b> Shibuye Community Health Workers	<b>Local</b> Dialogue and market	National Gender and Equality Commission; Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries; National AIDS Control Council; County Government of Kakamega	Action Aid Kenya, Transparency International	310	70
<b>Malawi</b> Centre for Community Organisation & Development	<b>National</b> Community mobilization, case studies, radio discussion	Ministry of Gender, Children Disability and Social Welfare; Member of Parliament; Lilongwe City Council	21 Community-Based Organizations	79	50
<b>Nigeria</b> International Women Communication Centre	<b>National</b> Community mobilization, national engagement forum, media talks	Federal Ministry of Environment, Governor's Office	University of Ilorin, Kwara State Action Committee on AIDS, Nigeria Labour Congress	230	10
<b>Senegal</b> Directoire National des Femmes en Elevage	<b>Local</b> Dialogue and Exhibition of agro-pastoral products	Ministry of Women, Family and Children; Local government of Tambacounda region	Local women's organizations	1050	65
<b>Zimbabwe</b> Ntengwe for Community Development	<b>Local</b> 4 awareness sessions, dramatic enactments of SDGs, Melting Pot Symposium	Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development; Ministry of Education; Ministry of Agriculture; National AIDS Council; Matabeleland AIDS Council	ZBO Trust, World Vision, Save the Children	300+	100+
<b>ASIA</b>					
<b>Bangladesh</b> Participatory Development Action Program	<b>Local</b> Stakeholders' dialogue, rally, human chain	Local government of Munshiganj and Sylhet Districts	BRAC	50	30
<b>India</b> Swayam Shikshan Prayog	<b>National</b> 4 Community consultations, 1 National Policy Forum	Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare; Ministry of Rural Development; Planning Commission; Rajmata Jijau Health and Nutrition Mission; Maharashtra State Rural Livelihoods Mission; Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Osmanabad; Agriculture University, Parbani	Symbiosis International University's Centre for Innovation, Entrepreneurship & Intrapreneurship	500	30
<b>Indonesia</b> YAKKUM Emergency Unit	<b>Local</b> "Women Build Resilient Villages – Resilient Women for Resilient Villages" Campaign	National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB); Local Disaster Management Agency (BPBD)	Handicap International, Yakkum Rehabilitation Centre, JaRI, Community Development Bethesda, other Community-Based Organizations	108	35



CARIBBEAN					
<b>Bahamas</b> Bahamas Network of Rural Women Producers	<b>Local</b> Radio talk shows, newspaper articles, dialogue documentary aired on national television	Ministry of Social Services and Community Development, Department of Local Government, Royal Bahamas Police Force	Broadcasting Corporation of the Bahamas	30	0
<b>Jamaica</b> Jamaica Network of Rural Women Producers	<b>Local</b> Education workshops, stakeholders' dialogue, rural women's conference, farmer's market	Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Rural Agriculture Development Authority, Planning Institute of Jamaica, Bureau of Women's Affairs, Development Bank of Jamaica	FAO, Inter American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture, Maggi Corporation, Jamaica Agricultural Association	60	0
<b>Trinidad &amp; Tobago</b> Network of Rural Women Producers Trinidad & Tobago	<b>Local</b> Skills training & self-defense classes, rural women's leadership recognition, "Cities for CEDAW" workshop, Orange Day observation	Port of Spain City Corporation, Sangre Grande Regional Corporation	Regional Rotary Club	73	20
LATIN AMERICA					
<b>Brazil</b> Cooperativa Ser do Sertão	<b>Local</b> Consultations at the municipal, territorial, and state levels; documentary	Municipal Secretariat of Social Development, Municipal Secretary of Education, Legislative Assembly of Bahia	Women's cooperatives, associations, and unions	120	25
<b>Brazil</b> Espaço Feminista do Nordeste para Democracia e Direitos Humanos	<b>Local</b> Policy Dialogue in Recife, baseline survey of SDG indicators, radio pilot	Pernambuco Institute for Land and Agrarian Reform (Iterpe); Secretária da Mulher do Estado de Pernambuco; Ministério do Desenvolvimento Agrário; Secretaria do Patrimônio da União; Ministério Público; Promotoria Agrária do Estado; Defensoria Pública da União; National, state, & local officials	Fundação Landesa, International Land Coalition, AWID, Fundação Joaquim Nabuco (Fundaj), Consórcio de Municípios da Mata Norte de Pernambuco (Comanas)	82	11
<b>Bolivia</b> Centro de Mujeres Aymaras Candelaria	<b>Local</b> 3 sub-regional consultations, radio pilot	Representatives of municipal and national government	Asociación Warawara, Fund. Apachita, Fund. Mojsa, Cooperativa de Salud Aroma, Centro de Desarrollo Integral Kuichi "Cedeinku," Centro de Desarrollo Integral "Inti"	180	72
<b>Guatemala</b> Fundación Guatemala & Coordinadora para el Desarrollo Integral de las Mujeres Mayas	<b>National</b> Radio program, best practices fair, national dialogue	Defense of Indigenous Women (DEMI); National Forestry Institute (INAB); National Coordinator for Disaster Reduction (CONRED); Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food (MAGA); Ministry of Finance (MINFIN); Human Rights Ombudsman (PDH); National Compensation Program (PNR); Ministry of Culture and Sports (MICUDE)	UN Women; UN Population Fund; Obs. on Sexual & Reproductive Health (OSAR-ISDM); CARE; Coordination Center for Natural Disaster Prevention (CEPREDENAC); Univ. of San Carlos; Center for Research, Training & Support for Women (CICAM)	104	1
<b>Nicaragua</b> Unión de Cooperativas de Mujeres Productoras "Las Brumas"	<b>Local</b> Dialogue with municipal and national government entities, farmer's market	Ministerio de Economía Familiar; Ministerio del Ambiente y los Recursos Naturales; Sistema Nacional para la Prevención, Mitigación y Atención ante Desastres; Municipal government of Wiwili and San Sebastián de Yali	Local women's organizations	200	3

# THE FORMALIZATION OF RURAL WOMEN'S ROLE IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

At the core of the Rural Women's Empowerment Initiative is the goal that a broad and diverse network of rural grassroots women's organizations would appropriately frame their development priorities in relation to processes involving the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and influence those processes accordingly. An overarching theme that emerged across the wide spectrum of consultative dialogues was rural women's desire to actively contribute to their respective country's development agenda, underlining the need to formalize their role in decision-making processes and to see them as equal partners in defining national priorities. The focus is on building the numbers and

## ◆ CONCRETE PARTNERSHIPS

The dialogues showed how grassroots and rural women's organizations work closely with local and national authorities to build strategic partnerships. In a mix of state- and local-level consultations, the Brazilian feminist network Espaço Feminista do Nordeste para Democracia e Direitos Humanos engaged with stakeholders such as the Ministry of Agrarian Development, Institute for Land and Agrarian Reform of the State of Pernambuco (Iterpe), Rural Women's Commission, Ministério Público of Brazil, and other non-governmental organizations. To facilitate greater outreach among the rural population of Pernambuco State, the dialogues were accompanied by a series of five radio broadcasts<sup>3</sup>. Interviews and debates featuring state institutions, city councilors, rural activists, and development professionals, served as a means to increase awareness about the 2030 Agenda and also shed light on how grassroots women can act as critical agents in monitoring rural development policies related to the SDGs.

As a result, representatives of state and local governments expressed their commitment to address the gender gap in public policies and programs and also agreed to partake in a multi-stakeholder platform for monitoring SDGs (especially for Goals 1, 2, 5, and 11). The 3-year pilot is being led by the Espaço Feminista network, in partnership with global, national, and local institutions (including the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics-IBGE).

*“We want to gain support from governments and civil society in the sense of a commitment to implement this new agenda and monitor this implementation so that we can reverse the current situation...with inclusive policies.”*

*—Patricia Chaves, Espaço Feminista<sup>9</sup>*

In Kakamega County, Kenya, Shibuye Community Health Workers focused on how rural women's collectives could partner with government line ministries and departments to design and implement policies that reflect rural women's realities. Throughout the dialogue, rural leaders discussed ways to include women in decision-making processes and to apply gender

<sup>3</sup> Radio broadcasts were in partnership with the Movimento da Mulher Trabalhadora Rural, Marcha Mundial das Mulheres, and Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Terra (MST). Broadcasts were aired on Nova Timbaúba (96.9 FM), Jovem Cap (AM 1240), Rádio Olinda (AM 1020), Naza (91.1 FM), and Alternativa/Amunam (98.5 FM).

<sup>9</sup> Translated from 6 August 2015 interview with Diário de Pernambuco newspaper



## CELEBRATING RURAL WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AT THE NIGERIAN NATIONAL WORKSHOP



mainstreaming practices such as gender-responsive county budgeting to a wide range of rural development initiatives and investments. Promising partnerships were formed as a result of this dialogue. The Directorate of Gender (within Kenya's Ministry of Development and Planning) opened a slot to Shibuye's leaders during the launch of her agency's agenda on rural women and the SDGs in July 2016, resulting in a proposed plan of action for inclusive implementation.

### ◆ CLAIMING VOICE IN DECISION-MAKING

Facing exclusion in male-dominated decision-making spaces, grassroots and rural women sought to disrupt or break through traditional governance processes. Rural women of Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) in central India held a multi-state dialogue in the drought-stricken states of Maharashtra and Odisha in December 2015. Echoing the voices of over 13,000 women farmers, rural women asked for formal recognition as leaders in efficient water resource management, protective irrigation practices, and the shift from cash crop cultivation to food-secure multi-cropping<sup>4</sup>. They maintained that given active decision-making and facilitation roles, eligible women farmers could bridge the gap between needs of rural poor and the aspirations of local policymakers, and support the effective implementation of sustainable livelihood policies. This was since achieved when, through sustained advocacy, women leaders were appointed to the village-level Drought Prevention Committees (Baliraja Vikas Nidhi) established by the Government of Maharashtra.

Ntengwe for Community Development in northwestern Zimbabwe held four community consultations that culminated in a Melting Pot Symposium in Mabale ward, Hwange district where over 400 rural women and men

were joined by representatives of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture, National AIDS Council, and local government. Concretely, Ntengwe's activities established opportunities for women to become part of ward-level decision-making processes. For instance, traditional leaders invited two women from each group to attend their consultative ward meetings on SDG implementation. A water development project to assist rural women seeking relief from severe water scarcity was yet another culmination from this initiative; even more, local women were appointed to the Water Management Committee to bring their priorities and day-to-day concerns to the table.

*“Sustainability of agriculture highly depends of equal participation of women in decision making.”*

*—Shri Vikas Deshmukh, IAS, State Commissioner, Agriculture, Government of Maharashtra, India*

### ◆ IMPACT ON LOCAL POLICY

The dialogues also show how organized groups of grassroots women are capable of influencing local policy. For example, through a successful advocacy campaign, rural women farmers of Jinotega, Nicaragua, have integrated their priorities into the local development agenda. The women of the Unión de Cooperativas “Las Brumas” successfully secured support for purchasing agricultural supplies in the Wiwilí municipal budget.

<sup>4</sup> SSP women's groups marshaled useful resources and implemented a mass awareness campaign on resilient agriculture practices and effective water resource management in affected villages in two states of India. See more on their practices in *Agricultural Practices in Drought Situation by the Community Practitioners Platform for Resilience*, available at <https://huairou.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/India-sequia-web.pdf>.

## ORANGE DAY COMMEMORATION IN TRINIDAD & TOBAGO



In the neighboring municipality of San Sebastián de Yali, the technical team of Las Brumas has reached an agreement with city hall to facilitate trainings on the Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the climate change negotiations. As such, they have a veritable opportunity for influencing the local development agenda.

In Tambacounda, Senegal, the Directoire National des Femmes en Elevage (DINFEL) led a celebration of the International Day of Rural Women (15 October), bringing over 1,125 participants. Lauding the efforts of DINFEL, the representative of the Ministry of Women, Family and Children pledged their commitment to mainstream gender and promote opportunities for women in public policies; furthermore, the Chairman of the County Council strongly recommended that the day of commemoration be celebrated annually, thus embedding rural women's contributions in the local agenda. Bridging the local and global, the Network of Rural Women Producers of Trinidad and Tobago (NRWPTT) persuaded the Mayor of Port of Spain to sign onto UN Women's HeForShe campaign (committing to advance and achieve gender equality for all); and as a direct result of their dialogue activities, members were invited by their national government to participate in priority-setting sessions to review national development policy.

## ◆ CHALLENGING STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES

The dialogues additionally created a space to revisit structural issues and inequities at the national level, paving the way for long-term transformation. In Nigeria, the International Women Communication Centre (IWCC) held a series of community meetings across the country, culminating in a national workshop. With participation from key ministries, officials, policymakers,

and community stakeholders, this was the first program of its kind organized for Nigerian rural women focused on the Sustainable Development Goals. At their national dialogue in Lilongwe, Malawi, the Centre for Community Organisation and Development (CCODE) focused on the role of men in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 5, "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." Taking into account deeply ingrained beliefs about men and women's place in the community, the dialogue in Malawi sought to prove how achieving SDG 5, especially the integration of women's perspectives in decision-making processes, would serve as a gateway for realizing the remaining Goals. In another vein, the women of Cooperativa Ser do Sertão (Pintadas, Brazil) noted how the role of women in agriculture is far undervalued despite their active involvement in local governance and their important contributions to sustainable development.

This section illustrates that the collective priority that emerged out of the eighteen dialogues was the need to formalize rural women's role in decision-making processes. Despite the key role played by women in achieving food security, building resilience, and contributing to rural development, structural barriers diminish their voice in policy formulation and rural governance. Moreover, rural women cannot surface as claimants of formal roles if they are systematically excluded on the basis of their gender. The examples presented in this section demonstrate that decision-making holds a distinct meaning, depending on the different regional or thematic contexts in which the women's organizations operate. The dialogues also showed the willingness of rural women to partner with their governments to advance a rural development agenda that responds to their expansive and intersecting priorities.



# VULNERABILITIES AND ADAPTIVE ACTION IN RESPONSE TO CLIMATE AND DISASTER THREATS AND RISKS

Out of the 18 grassroots women's networks and community-based organizations participating in the Rural Women's Empowerment Initiative, less than half operate with an explicit focus on agricultural activities. Nevertheless, women's role as farmers was a common theme that emerged among all of the dialogues. Whether the women engage in agricultural production as a principal means for income generation or as a side activity to supplement household food security, they commonly lack formal recognition for their role. This is a particularly regressive notion considering that at a global level, women farmers are recognized for bearing the burden of making communities food secure<sup>5</sup>. Linking many of the dialogues together was the preoccupation of how climate change, natural disasters, and even the misappropriation of natural resources have affected and will continue to affect the lifestyles of rural women.

## ◆ CLIMATE CHANGE SOLUTIONS

In some of the countries involved in this initiative, women farmers are leading the way on adaptive innovations to vulnerabilities generated by climate change and natural disasters. A successful example implemented in Guatemala and India (among others) is the Community Resilience Fund (CRF) operated by the Huairou Commission and GROOTS International, which is grassroots-led and is focused on reducing vulnerability to climate and disaster risks and losses in poor rural and urban communities subject to tropical storms, flooding, landslides, drought, seismic activity, food insecurity, and other threats<sup>6</sup>.

The CRF was cited favorably at the national dialogue held in Guatemala City by Fundación Guatemala, in association with the grassroots women's organization Coordinadora para el Desarrollo Integral de las Mujeres

Mayas (CODIMM); where participants pointed out the need to increase awareness of traditional knowledge and indigenous and local practices, as a complement to scientific knowledge on climate change and disaster risk management. The multi-state dialogue hosted by Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) in Pune, India, similarly looked toward local practices to achieve local food security and improve household nutrition. Rural women farmers and key stakeholders from government institutions and civil society organizations discussed the various initiatives led by women to adopt resilient practices (see Box 1); a timely discussion for SSP's work in drought-affected districts of Maharashtra. Moving forward, the women of SSP will partner with the Vasantrao Naik Marathwada Agricultural University on knowledge transfers in other districts; and with the Ministry of Rural Development to train village officials in Maharashtra on planning for drought prevention, the effective use of local resources, and the value of women's leadership and community participation.

*“One of poor vegetable farmers from our group cultivated fenugreek, but the prices went down. She did not sell it in the market; she took a small loan and sun dried her produce and sold the dried fenugreek powder on 10 times profit.”*  
—Sanjeevani Mali, SSP women's federation member

<sup>5</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2011). *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11: Women in Agriculture*. Rome: FAO. See also World Bank (2011). *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

<sup>6</sup> More information can be found in The CRF Operational Guidelines, accessible at <http://huairou.org/global-community-resilience-fund-operational-framework-and-guideline>.

#### BOX 1: SUPPORT FROM THE COMMUNITY RESILIENCE FUND (CRF)

**Guatemala:** *Projects realized have successfully increased local food security and community resilience, such as organic agriculture, open-air table gardens, diversified plots, hedgerows as living enclosures (barerras vivas), water harvesting, and women's access to clean energy.*

**India:** *The CRF provided low-interest loans to over 1,120 'unbanked' farmers, belonging to women's federations in 266 villages. This money is used to access water conservation tools and machineries to recharge water sources, as well as to start new micro enterprises such as seed propagation, worm composting, food processing, and vegetable dehydration. As a result, women farmers have been able to diversify their agribusinesses, sustain agricultural activities in the fields, and generally do well during the drought seasons.*

(RADA), so that access to extension programs on climate-smart agricultural practices (e.g. rainwater harvesting) and capacity development is extended to its membership.

In Donga State, Benin, the Ministry of Agriculture and the local governments of Ouaké and Djougou have committed to helping women's groups achieve their developments goals on farming and processing shea butter, cassava, and rice. Rural women's contributions to the national economy and the national agenda on food security were recognized at Grassroots Sisterhood Foundation's local dialogue in Tamale, Ghana; representatives of the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Savanna Accelerated Development Authority (SADA), and others pledged their commitment to an open door policy regarding the implementation of corresponding SDGs. Grassroots Sisterhood Foundation has identified this as an opportunity for integrating rural women into the planning and design of programs to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

## ◆ RESPONSES TO RURAL WOMEN'S PRIORITIES

Governments in many of the dialogues expressed interest in supporting rural women producers in their innovative efforts to combat risks caused by climate change and natural disasters. In the Caribbean states that held dialogue activities (Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, and the Bahamas), there was a call for greater investment in women farmers, to develop their capacity for practicing climate-smart and resilient agriculture. Based on this input, the Minister for Social Services and Community Development committed to partnering with the Bahamas Network of Rural Women Producers (BAHNROP) to assess the priorities of women on Cat Island. The members of the Network of Rural Women Producers of Trinidad and Tobago (NRWPTT) are forging a partnership with stakeholders in the Pacific and other parts of the Caribbean, who similarly face climate-induced impacts on agricultural products. Their counterparts of the Jamaica Network of Rural Women Producers (JNRWP) have formed an agreement with the national Rural Agricultural Development Authority

## ◆ THE SDGs ARE AN OPPORTUNITY

Other rural women's organizations have identified the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a tool for furthering their efforts to redefine and achieve a sustainable agricultural model. Cooperativa Ser do Sertão in Pintadas, Bahia, Brazil, plans to utilize the SDG framework to improve the production process of family farms and small agricultural enterprises<sup>7</sup>. Having already begun working to implement resilient agricultural practices, these women see the 2030 Agenda as an opportunity to push for a sustainable agribusiness model, which would effectively strengthen local development. The women of Unión de Cooperativas "Las Brumas" in Nicaragua also have high hopes for the implementation of the SDGs, as it is a framework that recognizes their best practices incorporating the areas of environment, climate change and sustainable development.

<sup>7</sup> This is in line with SDG 2, Target 2.3 to "double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers."

## WOMEN'S GROUP OF ASSODÈ, OUAKÉ DISTRICT, BENIN



To bring attention to the work of rural women in maintaining available water sources and sustainable family farming in the Bolivian highlands, Centro de Mujeres Indígenas Aymaras Candelaria disseminated information on the 17 SDGs, with a particular focus on food security and sovereignty, via local 'community radio' stations. Through a series of 60 radio broadcasts, Centro Candelaria estimated to have reached an audience of 5,000 families in 17 municipalities of the La Paz, Oruro, and Potosí departments<sup>8</sup>. As a result, the pilot has awoken the collective conscience of these rural communities, inspiring a wide variety of stakeholders (ranging from churches to civic and indigenous organizations to local education directorates) to unite them in forming action-based alliances.

## ◆ BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Apart from the challenges posed by climate change, a major priority that emerged was building community resilience and reducing risks caused by natural disasters. In villages of the Munshiganj and Sylhet Districts of Bangladesh, members of the Dhaka-based organization Participatory Development Action Program (PDAP) celebrated the International Days for Disaster Risk Reduction (13 October) and of Rural Women (15 October) with activities to build community capacity for action in times of serious flooding.

In Indonesia, Yakkum Emergency Unit (YEU) held their dialogue in concurrence with the National Disaster Risk

Reduction Commemoration in Surakarta. Participants representing groups of rural women and men, people with disabilities, disaster units, and the Local and National Disaster Management Agencies discussed the role of women grassroots leaders in building community resilience to cope with disaster and climate change, and formal roles for women preceding, during, and following a disaster. Participants called upon their government to create an enabling environment that formally recognizes and resources rural women's role as facilitators of resilience practices (including sustainable crop cultivation, rice banks, maintaining an integrated health post, and establishing trash collection and recycling programs). These priorities were embedded in the official National Declaration of Disaster Risk Reduction for Human Sustainable Development emerging from Surakarta. As a result of the dialogue, YEU further succeeded in securing several agreements with the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB), which committed to documenting and publishing grassroots women's resilience practices, consulting regularly with local stakeholders, and incorporating community resilience indicators proposed by women leaders.

The dialogues featured in this section illustrate how, despite facing the direct impacts of climate change and natural disasters, rural women have taken innovative action in realizing sustainable agriculture and in building community resilience to combat new threats and vulnerabilities. In countries such as Guatemala, India, and Indonesia, women leaders have made concrete steps to ensure the resilience of their communities, and are being acknowledged for such at the national level. To foster this sort of innovation and partnership in other regions, it is clear that investment in rural women is vital. The dialogues also underlined how in formulating policy related to SDG implementation, governments must consult with women farmers and assess their priorities, whether this be in the form of extension support for implementing sustainable agricultural practices, for making funds available at the village level for resilience activities in disaster-prone areas, or other investment in rural areas.

<sup>8</sup> Broadcasts were aired on Red de Comunicaciones Apachita, Radio Eco Saywani, and Comunicaciones Wayra, among other smaller rural community radio stations.

## ACCESS AND CONTROL OVER LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Despite their innovative approaches to farming, it emerged from the dialogues that women's formal recognition as farmers and as leaders in agriculture is in fact undermined by their lack of access to and control over land and resources (natural or otherwise). Throughout the 18 dialogues in the Rural Women's Empowerment Initiative, a common priority for rural women was achieving greater empowerment by means of securing land titles for themselves: with control over land comes control over decision-making on that land. A similar logic was applied to other resources to which rural women lack access, including markets, financial services, and water. Whether discussing access to pastoral land in Senegal or the economic dependence of women and children in Malawi, rural women found that each of these deficiencies directly affected their means and capacity for generating income and their overall livelihood security.

### ◆ INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

In Maharashtra, India, the dialogues showed that women farmers carry out at least 90% of the work in cultivation, and yet without their name on a land title, they have little or no decision-making power when it comes to farming methods or selling the produce. To combat this, agricultural leaders within the Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP) network presented a successful "one acre model." Women are given cultivation rights over one acre of land, on which they practice organic farming for household consumption. They utilize indigenous seed varieties and natural fertilizers and pesticides, thereby saving input costs; empirical evidence demonstrates that yields remain constant, leading to increased revenue at the household level. Indeed, women farmers implementing the one acre model have experienced a reduction in cultivation costs of more than 50%, while watching their income increase over 50%. Combined with observed health improvements from consuming organic products, this is an attractive model that has gained a following among both women and men.

*"Women's economic status is unenviable. While they contribute 70% of agriculture labour—Malawi's economic base—they have little or no control over means of production."*

—CCODE Dialogue, Malawi

### ◆ INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT & MARKET ACCESS

To complement access to land, rural women require access to a wide range of resources to thrive economically. For example, women farmers at Shibuye Community Health Workers' dialogue in Shinyalu, Kenya made clear that their ability to earn a living is impeded by the difficulties in securing land tenure and accessing markets to sell their products. Grassroots women gave testimonies about being denied their rights to property and the ineffectiveness of judicial institutions, and they underlined the need for rural women to hold leadership positions on local market management committees. Moving a step further, their peers of the Jamaica Network of Rural Women Producers (JNRWP) entered an agreement with their country's Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA) to broaden access to diverse markets, including selling to school nutrition programs and receiving educational training on production standards for regional and international markets. In order to establish themselves as formidable players in those markets, JNRWP's farmers indicated that they require access to financial services and entrepreneurial skill development.



## ◆ OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

Throughout the dialogues, the rural women often identified opportunities for change. In Recife, Brazil, Espaço Feminista pinpointed the political change necessary to secure women's land rights. Participants envisioned the process of strengthening women's land tenure as part of a broader change in legal infrastructure, which should support women's land and property rights and their access to justice in urban and rural settings. Observing an intersection of interests between the women's movement, the land rights movement, and the environmental movement in Brazil, participants sought leadership at the grassroots level to forge a coalition. As a practical step, Espaço Feminista launched the global campaign on community and traditional land rights *Land Rights Now*<sup>9</sup>, and presented the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT)<sup>10</sup> in popular language.

The lack of control over land and other resources is a structural issue, one that is related to a lack of appreciation for rural women's contributions to sustainable development. Although rural women have successfully demonstrated how they can bring innovative solutions to agriculture and other areas, without control and decision-making power over their own land, they cannot scale up production or fully benefit from the economic and livelihood opportunities presented by agriculture. The examples of the one acre model in India and land rights movements in Brazil and elsewhere demonstrate concrete means for rural women to change their circumstances, and in doing so, to amplify their voice and role in rural development.

### SHARING AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES DURING LOCAL CONSULTATION IN INDIA



*“We want agriculture to be seen as decent work and our women within that sector to be recognised as contributors to the development of our country.”*

–Mildred Crawford, Jamaica Network of Rural Women Producers<sup>b</sup>

<sup>9</sup> More information available at: <http://www.landrightsnow.org/en/home/>

<sup>10</sup> See more about VGGT: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3920e/i3920e11.pdf>

<sup>b</sup> As quoted in 10 October 2015 “Deck Stacked Against Rural Women” article in The Gleaner newspaper

# CONCLUSION: RURAL WOMEN AND AN SDG AGENDA THROUGH 2030

A clear intersection of crosscutting priorities emerged from the Huairou Commission-IFAD Rural Women's Empowerment Initiative. Rural development does not take place in a silo, and neither does rural women's empowerment. The rural women involved in this initiative have voiced their desire for a formal role in decision-making processes, whether this means having a seat at the national or local policymaking table, or in wresting decision-making power over their family's agricultural production, their community's resilience practices, or their own economic freedom. The framework created by the Sustainable Development Goals is a means by which rural women can establish themselves as leading agents of transformative change in their community and in their country. Several conclusions were drawn from the Initiative, which can serve as pillars in envisioning a collective action agenda for rural transformation.

## **Rural women farmers are not formally recognized as producers in their own right.**

Hailed at the UN and other international forums as drivers of food security, rural women nevertheless lack recognition as farmers in their local and national contexts. The dialogues illustrated numerous accounts of women being unable to effectively engage in commercial agriculture due to their lack of control over land or necessary resources such as farming machinery. On the other hand, those women who establish themselves as producers are often undervalued in terms of their contributions to development.

## **Public and private investment in rural women's producer organizations is necessary so that they may diversify their production and commercialization in response to the effects of climate change and shifting markets.**

Although smallholder farmers currently make up an estimated 85 percent of farms worldwide<sup>11</sup>, a main obstacle identified by women farmers in the initiative was their inability to access national or international

markets; as such their expected income is stunted. The case exists for increasing public support for agriculture<sup>12</sup>, particularly for improving the yields of smallholder farmers and for increasing the income of rural households<sup>13</sup>. Rural women have identified the need for low-interest loans or other forms of investment in order to diversify and increase their production, using sustainable, resilient, and climate-smart agricultural practices.

## **Empowering rural women to convene public policy dialogues and engage decision-makers is crucial to catalyze SDG implementation.**

Through this initiative, rural women in 19 countries across Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia are now advocates for the 2030 Agenda and especially for those Sustainable Development Goals that appeal directly to their own circumstances. Even more, the women have successfully engaged a multitude of partners – spanning across the full range of national and local government, intergovernmental agencies, international NGOs, community-based organizations, male counterparts, professionals, researchers, and activists – to dialogue on their distinct development priorities. In this way, they have formed meaningful partnerships and influenced policies, plans, and programs affecting rural constituencies. They have dispersed the notion that rural women and men remain passive beneficiaries of development projects (as was the case in the era of the Millennium Development Goals); instead stepping forward as leaders in the new global framework. Women leaders have additionally motivated ordinary members of rural communities worldwide to understand national policies, to set priorities within local budgets, and to monitor their implementation. In this way, rural women have their own stake in the 2030 Agenda; this in itself is a crucial step to the framework's success.

<sup>11</sup> International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). (January 2015). *IFAD Post-2015 Policy Brief 3: Investing in smallholder family agriculture for global food security and nutrition*. Rome, Italy.

<sup>12</sup> Ash, Ken. (2013). *Solving the food crisis*. OECD Yearbook 2013. Retrieved from: <http://www.oecd.org/agriculture/solving-the-food-crisis.htm>

<sup>13</sup> Godfray, H. Charles J. et al. (12 February 2010). *Food Security: The Challenge of Feeding 9 Billion People*. *Science* 327 (812-818).



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPOWERING RURAL DEVELOPMENT

- **At the national level**, governments should incorporate SDGs 2.3<sup>14</sup> and 5.a<sup>15</sup> into their development plans, giving special focus to women farmers, seeking their input, developing entrepreneurship programs, and promoting the organization of producer cooperatives. Rural women must become meaningfully engaged in land governance, ensuring their equal access to, use of, and control over land.
- **At the national level**, governments must invest in capacity building and supply chain diversity for women farmers, as well as promoting rural women's primary and value-added products in international trade channels. Low interest loans should be made available to rural women, allowing them to effectively invest in sustainable agriculture practices, to start up small agricultural businesses, and to bring them to scale.
- **Local governments** must gender mainstream all agricultural policies and work with rural women's producer organizations to include their priorities in municipal budgets. This could include provisions for 'green funds,' to be utilized to bolster organic farming and climate-smart agriculture, ancestral and indigenous practices, and other actions led by rural women to protect the local ecosystem from the effects of climate change and disasters.
- **At the national and local levels**, investment in rural women's leadership needs to be continuous, to increase their visibility and their capacity to make informed decisions. Advocates for rural women's priorities should be trained to monitor and provide feedback to national and local development plans.
- **At the local level**, continued mobilization of rural women's groups will increase the visibility of their work. Local governments should select a critical mass of grassroots women leaders to sit on development committees, thereby ensuring that their priorities and experiences be taken into account.
- **The SDGs require a 'data revolution'** to collect and analyze data disaggregated by gender, age, urban/rural, and other parameters to monitor implementation. Rural women can support this process by collecting data at the local level, providing expertise on rural priorities, and supporting participatory forms of planning, implementation and monitoring.

## FARMERS OF UNIÓN DE COOPERATIVAS "LAS BRUMAS" AT MARKET IN MANAGUA



<sup>14</sup> By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.

<sup>15</sup> Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.





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