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Rural Women Around the World • 2nd edition

# Warriors

Photographs by Sebastião Salgado





# Warriors

Rural Women Around the World



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# Warriors

## Rural Women Around the World

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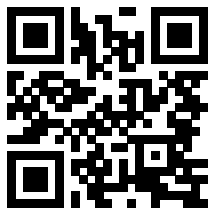
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- 05 FOREWORD**  
**Fighters**  
*Manuel Otero*  
Director General  
Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture
- 11 SECTION 1**  
**Rural Women on the Agenda...**  
**Rural Women's Agenda**
- 15 It is Time to Shine the Spotlight on Rural Women**  
*Susana Balbo*  
Chair  
Women 20  
Argentina
- 21 The Rural Women and Agenda 2030 in Latin America and the Caribbean:  
A Labor Market Perspective**  
*Alicia Bárcena*  
Executive Secretary  
Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)
- 27 In defense of rural women: a matter of justice and fundamental rights**  
*Carmen Calvo*  
Vice-President of the Government  
Spain
- 31 Rural Woman in Sustainable Development**  
*Margarita Cedeño*  
Constitutional Vice President of the Dominican Republic and Ambassador  
Extraordinary of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization  
(FAO)
- 35 Empowering Women in Rural Areas: Progress and Challenges in the  
Context of Agenda 2030**  
*Laura Chinchilla Miranda*  
Former President  
Republic of Costa Rica

- 41 Challenges and Opportunities for Rural Women in Mexico**  
*Nuria Costa Leonardo*  
Director General National Rural Women's Network (RENAMUR)  
Cuernavaca, Mexico
- 49 Inequality Is Our Greatest Challenge**  
*Isabel de Saint Malo de Alvarado*  
Former Vice President and Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Republic of Panama
- 55 The Unreported Alliance Between Vogue, IICA and Women 20**  
*Daniela Falcão*  
Managing Director  
Edições Globo Condé Nast  
Brasil
- 59 Empowering the "Force of Nature": International Policy Coordination for Global Recognition of Rural Women**  
*Angela Joo-Hyung Kang*  
Founder and Executive President Global Competitiveness Empowerment Forum (GCEF). A B20 member and a W20 Delegate  
Republic of Korea
- 67 Rural Women – A Gender Perspective**  
*Mara Marinaki*  
Ambassador, Principal Advisor on Gender and on the implementation of UNSCR1325 on Women, Peace and Security, European External Action Service (EEAS)  
Brussels, Belgium
- 73 The Opportunities for Transformation Open Up When Women Have Land Rights**  
*Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka*  
United Nations (UN) Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director  
UN Women
- 79 Rural Women of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow**  
*Rosa Monteiro*  
Secretary of State for Citizenship and Equality  
Government of Portugal
- 85 Empowering Our Female Farmers to End Food Insecurity**  
*Luis Alberto Moreno*  
President of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)



- 91 Rural Women and their Policies – a Matter of Equality**  
*Marta Lucía Ramírez de Rincón*  
Vice President  
Republic of Colombia
- 99 Rural Women – Making the Invisible, Visible**  
*Gabriela Ramos*  
Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Chief of Staff, Sherpa to the G7 and G20 and Special Counsellor to the Secretary-General  
Paris, France
- 105 Imagine the Future: Rural Women In Latin America and the Caribbean**  
*Katie Taylor*  
Executive Director of Pan American Development Foundation (PADF)
- 111 SECTION 2**  
**Figures that Loudly Portray Reality**
- 115 Poverty and Productive Involvement of Rural Women**  
*Josette Altmann Borbón*  
General Secretary of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO)
- 123 Opportunities and representation for rural women**  
*Tereza Cristina Corrêa da Costa Dias*  
Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply  
Brazil
- 129 Rural Women: The Need for a Development Model with a Differentiated Approach**  
*Carmen Rosa de León-Escribano*  
Executive Director of the Institute of Education for Sustainable Development and Representative on the Board of Directors of the Rural Development Bank (BANRURAL)  
Guatemala
- 135 How Crop Diversity and the Efforts of Rural Women Are Bringing Latin America More Nutritious Food**  
*Marie Haga*  
Executive Director  
Crop Trust

- 141 Agriculture's future is female**  
*Julia Klöckner*  
Federal Minister of Food and Agriculture  
Federal Republic of Germany
- 149 Addressing the Persistent Gender Gaps Becomes Imperative to the Economic and Social Development of Our Region**  
*Carmen Moreno*  
Ambassador, Executive Secretary of the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM)  
Organization of American States (OAS)
- 155 Rural Women in the Caribbean: Key Agents of Transformation for Genuine and Sustainable Development**  
*Mia A. Mottley*  
Prime Minister  
Barbados
- 161 The Vital Contribution of Rural Women**  
*Soledad Murillo de la Vega*  
Secretary of State for Equality Ministry of the Presidency, Relations with the Courts and Equality  
Spain
- 165 Rural Women in the Northern Triangle of Central America Play a Key Role in the Food and Nutritional Security of Their Families**  
*Patricia Palma de Fulladolsa*  
Director  
Program of Information Systems for Resilience in Food and Nutritional Security in the Region of the Central American Integration System (PROGRESAN-SICA)
- 169 Territorial Development: Brighter Prospects for Rural Women**  
*Susana Pinilla*  
Director and Representative  
Latin American Development Bank (CAF)  
Panama
- 179 From Knowledge to Action: Supporting Women in Agriculture in Latin America**  
*Francisco Rojas, Rector*  
Rector  
University for Peace  
San José, Costa Rica

- 187 Towards Gender Equality, a Challenge that Brings Us Together**  
*Carolina Stanley*  
Minister of Social Development  
Argentine Republic
- 193 SECTION 3**  
**In Our DNA**
- 197 The pivotal role of rural women in the development of Paraguay**  
*Silvana Abdo*  
First Lady  
Republic of Paraguay
- 201 Weaving My Way into the Fabric and Looms of Argentina’s Rural Women**  
*Verónica Alfie*  
Fashion designer. Creator of the Veroalfie brand  
Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 207 The Woman Whose Tears Flowed from One Eye Only**  
*Pilar Álvarez Molero*  
Journalist. Gender correspondent for El País newspaper  
Spain
- 213 More women in agriculture to feed the world**  
*Dana Bolden*  
Senior Vice-President, External Affairs and Sustainability for  
Corteva Agriscience
- 219 My Name Is Epsy Like My Grandma, a Brave Rural Woman**  
*Epsy Campbell*  
Vice President  
Republic of Costa Rica
- 225 The Declaration on the Rights of Peasants to improve the situation of rural women across the globe**  
*María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés*  
President of the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly
- 231 How I learned to see agriculture (and everything else) as a gender issue**  
*Melinda Gates*  
Co-chair  
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

**235 New Zealand's Rural Women: Past, Present and Future**

***Sarah Paterson***

Agricultural specialist. Leading expert in trade policy and stakeholder relations  
New Zealand

**243 A History of Effective and Affective Struggle for all Women's Rights**

***Rita Teixeira***

Movimento de Mulheres do Nordeste Paraense – MMNEPA (Women's  
Movement of Northeast Pará)  
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## **Foreword**

**Coffee plantation**  
The Cuchumatanes Range,  
Guatemala  
2006  
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# Foreword

## Fighters

**T**his book is the brainchild of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and CORTEVA Agriscience, and is a revised and expanded edition of the 2018 book launched in commemoration of the International Day of Rural Women. Its publication pursues a dual purpose.

The first and more explicit purpose is to pay a long overdue tribute to a figure that is key for the food security and economic and social progress of our continent.

This acknowledgment of rural women comes at a very timely moment, when a seemingly contagious movement of great proportions is sweeping across much of the world, shedding light on an enormous problem: approximately half of society suffers discrimination. That movement, which is essentially urban, is also present in rural areas.

The second and more ambitious objective - one that commits our institutions to a continuous and tenacious effort - is to launch a necessary public discussion that will stimulate the design and implementation of high-quality policies that will improve the lives of rural women.

We are already taking concrete steps in that direction.

Indicators, testimonies and field experiences “speak loudly” about the invisibility of rural women, noting their lack of - or insufficient access to - land ownership, production resources, credit, connectivity, potable water, education and training, health and justice.

Nearly 40 % of women who live in rural areas of Latin America and the Caribbean do not have their own income, compared with 14 % of rural men. Moreover, fewer than one-third of rural women hold the title to the land on which they live. In the rural milieu, there is also a generalized lack of recognition of the different types of work done by women.

Rural women are at a disadvantage with men who live in the countryside, as well as with urban women. Responsibility for reducing these gaps not only rests with governments, but also with civil society, which must make a commitment to address this problem.

This task also requires efforts to raise awareness in the mass media, organizing and promoting an interest in addressing a topic that has not been given sufficient space to allow for the forging of a great social coalition capable of transforming society.

Seen from an urban perspective, the studies carried out on gender relations in rural settlements are a kind of portrait reminiscent of a daguerreotype or a sepia photo, but created in the contemporary era.

These portraits reveal a constituent part of those relations, which are reflected in comments such as “she helps with the farm work” or “she doesn’t have any financial responsibilities”, compiled in an important work by the researchers Maria das Graças Rua and Miriam Abramovay, entitled “*Compañeras de lucha o coordinadoras de cacerolas?*”

The truth is that rural women not only play a vital role in the home, but also make a major contribution to production. In other words, they are jointly responsible for productive development, and also ensure the stability and survival of their families.

In spite of this situation, agricultural surveys confirm the undeniable state of social fragility that greatly concerns us. These surveys tend to underestimate women’s role in agriculture, often due to the omission by the women themselves, of their links with agricultural activities, while giving priority to household chores.

Although much progress has been achieved in recent years in terms of women’s empowerment and promoting gender equality, in the rural milieu women continue to be the ones responsible for looking after children and the home, preparing food and gathering firewood and water. Domestic work is not recognized as work. It is considered “natural” and “required” and little value is placed on it.

Women who live in rural areas of Latin America and the Caribbean are the ones who suffer most from the social, political and economic disparities in our countries.

It is necessary then to encourage the political participation of rural women in order to make their problems visible and begin to resolve them by ensuring their genuine representation at the heart of their communities, in parliaments and in the national, provincial and local governments. Empowerment is also about this process.

In all spheres, the unprecedented advance of information and communication technologies allows for an extraordinary exchange of ideas and reflections on a global scale. This book is also the result of this phenomenon, since it brings

together experts and personalities from the five continents to shed light on the problems of gender in rural areas.

It is a comprehensive endeavor that reflects the global scope of initiatives undertaken by IICA and CORTEVA Agriscience, and involves the participation of individuals from different areas, mainly women, who have had the privilege of moving among various cultures, exploring trends and options and who present, in this body of work, all sides and nuances of a story.

The authors capture, describe, interpret and transmit realities, and with them experiences, moods, emotions, commitments and points of view, in articles that express indignation, the intimate personal and family histories and, above all, ideas and proposals, revealing facts and aspects that would remain opaque or hidden if it were not for the sensitivity and sense of freedom that characterizes this initiative.

The texts contained in this book repeatedly highlight the debt pending with respect to rural women's economic participation, and insist on the need to guarantee their full access to education, employment, property, health and justice. They also stress the urgency of encouraging their involvement in decision-making.

The authors present well-founded claims and valid calls for the implementation of solid, long term public policies that benefit them. The fact is, unless governments and civil society pay greater attention to the situation of vulnerability suffered by rural women, the existing gaps will widen, bringing painful social consequences.

Some of the *enlightened voices* maintain that tackling the challenges ahead is not dependent upon large disbursements of public funds; instead, they believe, it requires decisive political will that neutralizes discrimination.

The writers also draw attention to the absence of incentives for young women to develop innovative ideas in their communities of origin. They note that the migration of rural populations is triggered by the lack of services, and that the roots of these populations are directly dependent on women.

They insist that it is crucial to take full advantage of the opportunities afforded by denominations of origin for agricultural products and by the revival of traditional arts and crafts that sustainability has consecrated as new market niches.

Their messages underscore the great convergence with IICA's areas of work and its programs for promoting agricultural and rural development, as they discuss the role of agriculture in government agendas, calling for this sector to be given greater priority in order to achieve a harmonious and comprehensive development.

Considering this goal as a priority is a "safe bet", since it builds citizenship and develops the capacity of human resources to formulate strategic plans enriched by international technical cooperation, one of the avenues along which international relations travel. In addition to the dimension of solidarity, cooperation has

the capacity to drive development, by encouraging the modernization of the productive sector and innovation in public administration and trade.

The authoritative voices brought together in this book also reinforce the need to understand agriculture as a means of creating opportunities for progress and value aggregation, promoting bold actions in pursuit of social and territorial cohesion. Another call to action that runs through the individual texts presented in this work, and whose individuality and diversity enhance the whole, making this book a document of great importance, is that they refer to the significance of a gender approach.

It has been clearly established that it is not sufficient to have a female or gender equity component in any given project or initiative. Nor is it simply a matter of increasing women's participation in such efforts. A true gender approach implies incorporating the experience, knowledge, interests and needs of women with the ultimate aim of empowering them.

That it is the appropriate path to follow in order to transform what we consider to be unequal social and institutional structures into egalitarian and fair structures, for men and women.

Another important point made, in a context of accelerated and growing urbanization in our continent, is the need to highlight the strategic importance of rural areas as irreplaceable scenarios for the modernization of production, anchored in competitiveness, inclusion and the development of science and technology with a horizon of sustainability.

This work also helps to bridge information gaps on problems that affect rural women, deficiencies that restrict their analysis and limit the spread of social awareness of the issues that concern them.

This publication provides new elements and greater precision about who Latin American rural women are and how they live, both adults and girls: their low levels of education, high percentage of illiteracy, overworked, with little or no income, employed in informal and temporary jobs, with little coverage by the social protection systems, minimal opportunities for access to land ownership, technology and technical knowledge and, in the case of indigenous rural women, suffering from double discrimination.

Considering the progress achieved to date, it is crucial and urgent to move faster and go farther. The objective is to fully attain the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Accomplishing this objective will depend on governments, international organizations and our societies.

One of the obligations of modern democracies is to create more and new spaces so that those population groups who suffer discrimination will no longer endure it. One way of opening up such spaces is to shine a powerful light on these questions

in order to gain understanding, as a first step toward transformation. This new edition of *Warriors – Rural Women Around the World* offers us all the tools for that process and that is precisely its most significant contribution.

The key words are empowerment and equity. That is our goal. This publication, a great convergence of knowledge and will, is first and foremost, a robust strategy for achieving it.

At IICA we are grateful for the immediate response and solidarity of the individuals who have contributed to make this book a reality. Their response is a clear demonstration of the joint responsibility assumed by all the prestigious voices participating, and makes our Institute even more committed to this great partnership to fight for the visibility of rural women.

This publication is also a starting point that repositions IICA in relation to a key issue for the sustainable development of the Americas, and should be followed by transformative projects aimed at improving the conditions of empowerment and equity. Achieving those objectives depends on all of us.

*Manuel Otero*

**Director General**

**Inter-American Institute for  
Cooperation on Agriculture**



# 1

**Rural Women on the Agenda...**  
**Rural Women's Agenda**

**Coffee picker**  
San Marcos de Tarrazú,  
Central region, Costa Rica  
2013  
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# It is Time to Shine the Spotlight on Rural Women

Women 20 aims to convince world leaders that development can only be achieved if women are integrated more fully

*Susana Balbo*\*

Women 20 (W20) is an affinity group that defends women's interests by interacting with the leaders of the G20, the forum for international cooperation that represents 20 economies. Focusing primarily on women's economic autonomy, our aim is to convince the leaders that development can only be achieved if women are integrated more fully into the labor force.

While progress has been made in recent decades, many challenges remain. The integration of an increasing number of women into the labor market has gathered pace in recent decades, leading to a substantial reduction in poverty and inequality. The rate of progress has slowed in recent years, however. The gender gap with respect to labor force participation rates may have narrowed, but the difference between men and women still stands at 27%.<sup>1</sup> Even today, 55% of women across the globe do not have their own income. Although the situation in the G20 countries is better, none have managed to close the gap in labor force participation.

\* Chair, W20  
Argentinian  
businesswoman  
First enologist in  
Argentina

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<sup>1</sup> ILO (International Labour Organization). 2016. Women at Work: Trends 2016. Switzerland, Geneva. 138 p.

In taking over the chair of the W20, Argentina has inherited three core areas of work: labor inclusion, digital inclusion and financial inclusion for women, the issues on which the discussions have centered in previous years. These areas of work remain crucial but this year we have decided to add another one that is extremely important for Argentina, the region and the world: the development of rural women.

There are many reasons for this decision. Firstly, the issue is strategically important for the purposes of the country's Presidency of the G20, since **achieving sustainable food production** tops the agenda. The W20 believes this objective will only be achieved if women play a bigger role and more favorable conditions are provided for them. Furthermore, the G20 countries account for 60% of the world's agricultural land and 80% of its food production.<sup>2</sup> We believe that the agreements that could be reached on women's role in food production and in the development of rural areas would have a global impact.



*Given rural women's limited voice and participation, W20 Argentina proposes that rural women be guaranteed full and effective participation in decision-making processes, particularly indigenous, campesino, migrant and Afro-descendant women. To that end, we request that programs be established to strengthen the capacity of local communities, leadership and negotiation, and to promote parity, the democratization of political systems and the reform of electoral legislation to guarantee women full and effective participation. This request is consistent with recommendation 35 of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, which underscores the importance of strengthening the voice, agency, participation and leadership of rural women and girls."*

Another very important reason is the predicament of rural women, many of whom are disadvantaged and invisible. Indeed, they are doubly disadvantaged because they are women and because they live in rural areas. All the global gender and development indicators point to the fact that the situation of rural women is worse than that of rural men and urban women. Women in rural areas have lower rates of employment and less access to basic services. In some cases, rural women have no identity document, which means they have no access to public resources, social protection, healthcare or education. They are also unable to elect their representatives or stand for office in order to ensure that their interests and needs are included in public policies. The fact that they work mainly in informal, poor quality, low-paid jobs limits their quality of life and that of their families.

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2 2018. Meeting of G20 Ministers of Agriculture. 26-27 July 2018. Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Overlooked as a group, rural women are subject to systematic discrimination and largely ignored in public policymaking processes.

For all the above reasons, but especially because of the key contribution that rural women make to economic development, we have decided to prioritize this issue. Rural women make a huge contribution to national economies, accounting for 43% of food production worldwide. It is also estimated that, were they to enjoy the same access to productive resources as their male peers, crop yields would be 20-30 percent higher, reducing hunger by 12-17 percent.<sup>3</sup> In a world in which climate change is causing more droughts and water shortages and driving up food prices, we have to think about strategies for increasing and improving food production. Therefore, it is vital that women have access to more resources and technological innovation.

Rural women play a decisive role in maintaining their families, strengthening communities and reducing poverty. Since women invest more in human capital—in the health, nutrition and education of their children—it makes financial sense to afford them greater access to economic resources, with the added fillip of possibly improving the future of the generations to come. Such measures have a big multiplier effect.

It should be noted that rural women are not a homogeneous group: they include indigenous, creole and Afro-descendant women. They also carry out a variety of activities as farmers, harvesters, fisherfolk and salaried workers. They also work in non-agricultural activities, such as handicrafts and tourism.

In many cases, it is rural women who preserve the knowledge and cultures of their peoples, passing on from one generation to the next the traditions, ways of life and livelihoods of their ancestors. Such knowledge must be safeguarded, as treasuring the past is the only way to ensure the future: a people with no past or roots has no future. Greater importance must undoubtedly be attached to such knowledge and traditions.

### **Argentina's debt to rural women**

The scale of the depopulation of rural areas in Argentina has been huge, with 90% of the population now living in urban areas<sup>4</sup> and the highest figures recorded in remote areas. It should be noted that this process now appears to have leveled out, stabilizing at current levels.<sup>5</sup> The distribution of men and women in rural areas is quite homogeneous, with a slightly higher percentage of men in the more remote

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3 FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011. Women in Agriculture: Closing the Gender Gap for Development*. FAO, Rome, Italy. 150 pp.

4 INDEC (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos). 2010. *Censo Nacional de Población, Hogares y Viviendas 2010: censo del Bicentenario: resultados definitivos*, Serie b n° 2. 1ª ed. INDEC. Buenos Aires, Argentina. 378 pp.

5 Alegre, S; Lizárraga, P; Brawerman, J. 2015. *Las nuevas generaciones de mujeres rurales como promotoras del cambio. Un estudio cuanti-cualitativo de la situación de las mujeres rurales jóvenes, de sus necesidades y oportunidades en Argentina*. UCAR, IPE-UNESCO. Buenos Aires, Argentina. 279 pp.

areas. Rural women tend to live in small towns, as they often have young children and seek better options for education, work, health, care, connectivity and quality of life.

Health services tend to be concentrated in urban areas and basic at best in most rural areas, due to the lack of human resources and specialized healthcare for women and children, especially with regard to sexual and reproductive health. New forms of access to health services have been introduced, such as programs under which well-equipped mobile units, doctors and health promoters are working in rural areas. This is an improvement on the situation of today's young women compared with previous generations, but access is still not guaranteed.<sup>6</sup>

Their gender and the fact that they live in rural areas are serious disadvantages as far as the integration of rural women into the labor market is concerned, with the situation being most critical in more remote areas. Fewer opportunities are available because of the difficulties they face in participating in the labor market while at the same time caring for the members of their households. Women in the countryside have a huge workload: they are responsible for domestic chores and the care of family members, productive tasks on family farms (basically for personal consumption and the sale of surpluses), as well as participating in community activities. The lack of childcare services and the blurring of the divide between productive and reproductive duties mean that all the efforts that rural women make to juggle the two roles go unrecognized.

A number of studies have highlighted the structural problems that exist in Argentina's rural areas, such as access to the labor market, natural and productive resources and new technologies, as well as limited access to land, shrinking farm size and the advance of the agricultural frontier. All these factors contribute to emigration and limit rural women's possibilities of economic development.

Women in rural areas also run the risk of becoming victims of violence because of the continued existence of traditional attitudes regarding the subordination of women. Their lack of access to justice and social protection services makes them even more vulnerable. Economic dependence prevents women from escaping from abusive relationships, especially when there are children in the household.

### **The legacy of the W20**

W20 Argentina has drafted a series of recommendations that, in our opinion, chart the course that the G20 leaders should take to achieve greater participation of rural women in their countries' economies. The delegates of the 20 member countries are agreed on the actions required.

Firstly, the countries should ensure that investment and improvements in infrastructure services, especially transport, roads, water, electricity, energy and connectivity, consider the needs of women and prioritize their economic

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

empowerment. To that end, rural women should be included in processes aimed at identifying, designing, implementing and maintaining infrastructure projects. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that botched infrastructure projects have failed to consider the needs of women or *usos y costumbres* (traditions and customs of indigenous communities) in rural areas.

Secondly, the G20 member countries should develop systems that can guarantee legal land ownership and protection from eviction, land grabbing and the dispossession of rural women. Based on their ownership of land, women should be guaranteed access to productive resources, technology and markets, and receive the technical assistance required for the activities they carry out.

Lastly, we aim to promote the economic empowerment of rural women through the creation of the Global Fund for Rural Women 2030. The purpose of this fund would be to finance the productive projects of rural women in the G20 countries.

Given rural women's limited voice and participation, W20 Argentina proposes that rural women be guaranteed full and effective participation in decision-making processes, particularly indigenous, campesino, migrant and Afro-descendant women. To that end, we request that programs be established to strengthen the capacity of local communities, leadership and negotiation, and to promote parity, the democratization of political systems and the reform of electoral legislation to guarantee women full and effective participation. This request is consistent with recommendation 35 of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, which underscores the importance of strengthening the voice, agency, participation and leadership of rural women and girls, and the full, equal and effective participation of women at all levels of decision-making. It also recognizes the critical role played by rural women's civil society organizations, trade unions, enterprises and cooperatives in gathering, uniting and supporting rural women in all spheres.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, it is extremely important that countries develop and implement statistical systems for collecting, analyzing and sharing qualitative and quantitative sex-disaggregated data on the situation of rural women, in order to craft evidence-based policies designed to improve women's development opportunities, economic empowerment and entrepreneurship. This recommendation is very important given the scarcity of official data on the situation of rural women around the world. If we are to grasp their situation and devise focused policies, we need to understand who they are, where they are and what they do, their *usos y costumbres*, migratory patterns, access to land and productive resources, links with the labor market, and the supply and quality of public goods available to them, among other things.

**What is the future of rural women within the G20?** Argentina's incorporation of this issue has proven to be a wise decision that has received strong support within the international community. We are therefore optimistic that Japan will continue to include work on the Development of Rural Women during its Presidency, and that the topic will be made a permanent area of the W20's work.

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<sup>7</sup> UN (United Nations). 2018. Economic and Social Council. Commission on the Status of Women, Sixty-second second session. 26 March 2018. 24 pp. Available for download at <http://undocs.org/en/E/CN.6/2018/L.8>.





# The Rural Women and Agenda 2030 in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Labor Market Perspective

Many rural women can only find  
precarious and low-paid jobs

*Alicia Bárcena\**

Throughout this decade, ECLAC has positioned equality as a fundamental value of development and an inalienable ethical principle. Inequality is not only unjust but also inefficient, since it creates and sustains institutions that fail to promote productivity and innovation. On the other hand, discrimination is an impediment to opportunities for improved learning and innovation to enhance productivity. Gender inequality, a defining structural feature of Latin America, provides the clearest example of this. It implies an unequal division of power, resources, time and wealth between men and women and is one of the root causes of the unsustainability of the predominant development system. The challenge is to effect progressive structural changes that help to transform the gender power balance from an economic, social, environmental and sustainable development perspective and to take action that addresses short and long-term challenges.

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At the global level, the objective of Sustainable Development Goal No. 5 (SDG 5) of the 2030 Development Agenda is to “*achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*”. There are a series of proposed targets that must be met in order to realize this goal: the implementation

of measures to enhance the economic empowerment of women (5.a) the use of new technologies (5.b), and the development of legal and policy frameworks to promote gender equality and empowerment at all levels (5.c).

At the regional level, the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda, which was approved in 2016 during the XIII Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, proposes a roadmap that closely aligns with the approach suggested by SDG 5. Unravelling the essential knots of gender inequality is a matter of justice and a prerequisite to dismantling the culture of privilege and replacing it with a culture of rights and equality. The culture of privileges ranks and values men as superior to women and reinforces, reproduces and perpetuates the power imbalance between the sexes.

Available data on the employment status of women in rural areas indicates that the disparities between their participation and employment rates, as compared to their male counterparts, is much more pronounced than in urban areas. This is because it is more difficult for women to find employment than men, and it is also

an indication of the invisibility of female rural workers who engage in unpaid domestic or farming activities for their own consumption, but which surveys fail to recognize as employed. Traditionally, rigid gender roles confine women to domains and tasks related to reproduction. Similarly, many rural women are considered secondary workers who merely complement household income, as seen in women's greater participation in seasonal agricultural employment. Consequently, many of the rural women can only find precarious and low-paid jobs, making them part of the "working poor", that is, workers whose salaries do not satisfy their basic needs, despite long working hours. This situation further compounds the precariousness of the current labor conditions of these women and also makes it more difficult for them to access social security in the future.<sup>1</sup>

*The global and regional challenge for 2030 will be to unravel the knots of gender inequality, by moving away from socioeconomic inequality and exclusionary growth to embrace the kind of development that guarantees substantive equality between men and women. It will mean evolving from rigid sexual divisions of labor and unjust social organization of care work by redistributing time, work and opportunities. It will call on us to abandon patriarchal, discriminatory and violent cultural patterns and the dominance of a culture of privileges, replacing it with a culture of rights and equality; and substituting excessive concentration of power for parity democracy."*

1 The Employment Situation in Latin America and the Caribbean, No 14, ECLAC/ ILO, May 2016

This article examines regional trends with respect to the empowerment of rural women, on the basis of their participation in the labor market<sup>2</sup>, which is a mechanism for economic empowerment. The evidence is inconclusive.

The first trend, which is the increase in the percentage of rural households headed by women, can be observed in almost all the countries for which comparable information is available. If we view this as an indicator of economic empowerment, the trend is positive, especially in rural areas in the region, which recorded a 40% increase in the share of female-headed households between 2002 and 2014. (ECLAC-FAO-IICA, 2017). However, households headed by women may be more vulnerable to economic shock and at risk for poverty, especially when the woman is the sole breadwinner in the home or when these funds are from non-labor sources (for example, transfers, including remittances). Information available on the distribution of rural employment bears this out. More than half of female-headed households are classified as inactive, whereas between 25 – 30 percent of these women are not paid for their labor (ECLAC-FAO-IICA, 2017). Furthermore, the proportion of female headship is still low - less than 25% in most of the countries (ECLAC-FAO-IICA, 2017). This is probably a reflection of the region's social norms in terms of gender roles, since the man is usually designated as the head of the family, even in cases when both partners contribute to the overall financial welfare of the home.

The trend of increasing female-headed households appears to have no correlation with declining poverty levels observed since the start of the century. Evidence suggests that it may more likely be a factor of structural changes in the rural environment, as seen in the contraction of the agriculture sector and the subsequent expansion of non-agriculture sectors. Estimates based on available information (ECLAC-FAO-IICA, 2015) indicate that as employment in the agriculture sector declines, female headship of rural households increases. Furthermore, the average age of female rural household heads has fallen, with a spike in the share of rural homes headed by females younger than 35 (ECLAC-FAO-IICA, 2015). This trend is more pronounced in rural than in urban areas. This is relevant, since this age group is less saddled by gender roles in relation to family care responsibilities and therefore the woman has the freedom to establish her own home.

The second relevant trend is the increase in rates of rural female employment. In recent decades, LAC has made significant strides in achieving SDG 5, demonstrating considerable progress in gender parity in education, health and participation in the labor force. The increase in the participation rate of females in the labor force was the largest in the world, more markedly so in the rural areas (ECLAC-FAO-IICA, 2015). These increases surpassed national employment rate increases, and with few exceptions, were seen in all age groups<sup>3</sup>. However,

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2 The data that was presented was collected in special household surveys conducted by ECLAC for use in the chapters on rural welfare for the last two ECLAC-FAO-IICA joint reports on the Outlook for Agriculture and Rural Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC-FAO-IICA, 2015 and 2017).

3 There were three age groups that were identified and that could be characterized as the young and economically active population (under 35), the adult labor force (25 – 60 years) and the retirement age population (older than 60).

employment profiles for rural women, by age group, differed considerably (depending on how they were remunerated, whether as self-employed individuals, employers or as unpaid family workers), which is also an indication of the influence of gender roles.

In the youngest group, the largest category of employment in most countries was wage-earning non-agricultural workers and a significant number were engaged in unpaid family work (more than 20% in several countries). In the middle-aged group (35 – 60 years), there was a transition to own-account employment, particularly in non-agriculture sectors. In the older age groups there was a further decline in non-agricultural paid employment, as well as greater increases in own-account employment, whether agricultural or non-agricultural.

These profiles are consistent with the growth in employment opportunities for younger women, as a result of the expansion of the non-agriculture sector. They also suggest that as women get older and assume more traditional roles, for example, in taking care of the family, they are more likely to abandon the formal labor market and to participate in more informal activities or to develop their own ventures, which they are able to balance with their role as caregivers.

Although detailed data is still not available, there is a clear tendency for rural women to enter the labor force by working in their own ventures. According to agricultural census figures from some countries, the proportion of female farm managers is in the region of 25%. This means that they are the ones making the technical and commercial decisions, and in many instances shouldering the weight of most of the production labor. As far as informal self-employment is concerned, women run various types of operations, while still undertaking their family care activities, for example, vegetable greenhouses, processed food preparation, craftwork, selling at local fairs, tourist ventures, among others. They operate a wide range of businesses, but with one overall feature in common: these enterprises succeed thanks to the drive, attention to detail and discipline of their proprietors. This is why women are attracting increased interest from development banks and public programs that foster production entrepreneurship.

The global and regional challenge for 2030 will be to unravel the knots of gender inequality, by moving away from socioeconomic inequality and exclusionary growth to embrace the kind of development that guarantees substantive equality between men and women. It will mean evolving from rigid sexual divisions of labor and unjust social organization of care work, by redistributing time, work and opportunities. It will call on us to abandon patriarchal, discriminatory and violent cultural patterns and the dominance of a culture of privileges, replacing it with a culture of rights and equality; and substituting concentration of power for parity democracy.

These distinct trends suggest the need for policies to support female-headed households, thereby bolstering the empowerment of women and gender parity. Governments will need to ensure that women acquire the same skills and earn comparable salaries to men in equivalent work conditions.

Increased education, access to financial resources and knowledge (goal 5.a) will increase the empowerment and independence of women, especially in the households that they head. However, although many countries, in theory, provide for the legal equality of women, the application of these protective measures is often ineffective. Ensuring that women have equal rights and more importantly, that they are aware of them, will increase the empowerment of women and will improve short and long-term gender parity. With greater legal protection, women will have more control of financial resources. This will benefit the next generation of girls, since once women have more control of household resources, they will channel more money into the education and health of their girls.

Improving equality in the work place (goal 5.c) will also be important. This will include equal pay and labor reconciliation mechanisms, for example with respect to maternity and paternity leave. The first will increase the incentive for women to enter the work force, as the opportunity cost of their time increases. The second will reduce the tendency of businesses to employ men over women, since all employees will receive the same parental benefits.

Fostering female employment will mean implementing policies that ensure that rural women consistently engage in and complete their education as a means of increasing their productiveness, and policies that promote the visibility of women as workers (formalizing labor relations through work contracts). It will also require the strengthening of policies and care services in rural areas and a more equitable distribution of unpaid domestic labor between men and women.

In view of the structural changes taking place in the rural environment, training programs should also be developed to allow women to take advantage of opportunities that may arise due to the growth of the non-agriculture sectors. Skills acquisition through formal education or capacity-building programs will enable them to adopt new technologies and innovations and to access higher paying jobs, within and outside of agriculture, and will facilitate production modernization. Ultimately, new skills contribute to reducing poverty and rural inequality in the long-term.

The introduction of new technologies (goal 5.b) is one way of encouraging women and younger and more educated individuals to establish new businesses, since they are more open to adopting new technologies than men and the older population (ECLAC-FAO-IICA, 2011). An important feature of these new technologies – in particular new information and communications technologies – is that they allow users to leapfrog certain stages of technological development, which opens windows of opportunity for rural economies, and in particular for women.

The situation also calls for further action in many other spheres (goal 5.c), beyond economic empowerment. For example, activities should be geared towards improving self-esteem; reducing intra-family violence; recognizing women's role as the custodians of indigenous seeds; ensuring that their contributions are clearly reflected in the statistics of public programs; promoting their participation in civil society organizations, and in general, their representation in managerial

positions, both in agribusinesses and in State entities. Furthermore, the high level of inactivity of female heads of rural households over 60 years of age underscores the importance of social protection policies in the rural environment, in particular for the protection of women (goal 5.c).

Rural women in the region are making strides, but the task is immense and much more is required. The objective of SDG 5, which is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls in the rural environment, is an ethical imperative, a matter of justice and a prerequisite to abandoning a culture of privilege in favor of a culture of rights and equality, in the rural areas of Latin America and the Caribbean.

# In defense of rural women: a matter of justice and fundamental rights

The sustainability of the rural environment is threatened by the same inequalities that continue to affect rural women

*Carmen Calvo\**

Women play an essential role in the rural economy and are also the backbone of life in rural societies. They are key players in the transfer of knowledge to upcoming generations, in preventing rural flight, and in achieving sustainable social, economic and environmental development in rural communities and in the wider society.

There are more than 8,000 municipalities in Spain, almost 72% of which have less than 2,000 inhabitants<sup>1</sup>. Women make up half of the rural population. Here are women who work the land each day... enterprising women... independent female entrepreneurs who spearhead innovative business initiatives to introduce previously unavailable products or services to their communities. They are powerful agents of change who will enable a more sustainable and ecological agriculture sector.

Women in Spain's rural communities, particularly the youngest among them, are more educated than their male peers and are keenly aware of emerging opportunities

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<sup>1</sup> Rural area, as defined by the Explotación Estadística del Padrón - INE (Statistical Analysis of the Census), is a group of municipalities with 2,000 or less inhabitants.

to diversify the economy in their areas, through activities that complement agriculture and the livestock industry, such as rural tourism, ecotourism, agrotourism, experience tourism, the craft industry, as well as in the transformation of indigenous products and in the agrifood sector, *inter alia*.

On the other hand, these women face roadblocks that are reducing their ability to access quality jobs. They endure excessively long work days, in jobs that often pay them less than men, and must also shoulder the major responsibility for caring for children, the elderly and dependents. These factors hamper and reduce their access to employment, social and political participation and forums for decision-making, in effect preventing them from enjoying genuine and effective equality of opportunities.

Structural barriers and entrenched stereotypes reinforce traditional gender roles, leaving the responsibility for invisible and unpaid tasks to women. The pervasive masculinization of agricultural and fishing activities restricts women's participation and presence in decision-making forums, making it difficult for them to own land or to access services and infrastructure.

Not only should these barriers be removed and the women living in these communities be given support, as a matter of justice and fundamental rights, but we should do so recognizing that without women, rural life would dwindle, age and eventually disappear.

Valuing and acknowledging women's work - both paid and unpaid -, empowering them and providing accessible and high-quality care services are essential if we are to fulfill the commitments of Agenda 2030, and specifically Goal 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and to empower all women and girls. Other closely

related goals are Goal 1 - to end poverty in all its forms; Goal 2 - to end hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition; Goal 8 - to promote full and productive employment and decent work for all; and Goal 13 - to take action to combat climate change.

In Spain, we have restructured our legal system, incorporating new standards to lay the foundation for a more equitable society, with the approval of Law 3/2007 of 22 March. This focuses on the effective equality of women and men, and introduces the principle of equal treatment and opportunities for women

*Valuing and acknowledging women's work - both paid and unpaid -, empowering them and providing accessible and high-quality care services are essential if we are to fulfill the commitments of Agenda 2030, and specifically Goal 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and to empower all women and girls."*



and men in all policies. The law pays particular attention to the status of rural women, and includes measures to improve educational levels and training, and also to facilitate women's access to the labor market and to leadership positions in companies and associations.

Of particular significance are legal changes that have taken place with respect to the joint ownership of agricultural holdings - Law 35/2011 of 4 October -, changes which have been long-demanded by women's associations and collectives in rural areas. This signals some progress in reshaping agricultural structures, by recognizing the equal rights of women in the agriculture sector, acknowledging their work and providing them with Social Security protection. Pursuant to this Law, both owners share the responsibility for managing and representing the agricultural holding, are entitled to a 50/50 share of profits, and are both considered as direct beneficiaries of any assistance or subventions that they receive as owners of the land. It also establishes a specific social security contribution rate that applies to everyone. Although the gains under this Law have been considerable, it has not resolved all of the problems that it set out to tackle. Therefore, legislators should continue to work assiduously on the matter.

Furthermore, introducing new information and communication technologies to rural settlements is a matter of urgency, as they hold the key to the development of women and children. By guaranteeing them access to ICT tools, promoting their participation in Information Society, boosting their confidence and comfort in using these new technologies, providing the necessary skills, information and knowledge and delivering improved internet connectivity to rural communities, women's entry into the work force will be facilitated.

We continue to work towards this end, through programs that offer training, mentoring and coaching for rural women who want to be self-employed or to start their own business project. We have developed an electronic trade platform (<http://desafiomujerrural.es/ecommerce/>) that provides an accessible web portal through which female entrepreneurs in rural areas can promote and sell their products - locally, nationally and regionally. The platform is complemented by a personalized tutoring service to assist entrepreneurs in using the system, in promoting their products and in ensuring safe financial transactions.

In partnership with the agrifood sector, in particular with cooperatives - which are the hub of economic activity in most Spanish rural communities -, we are promoting cultural changes in women and men to enable women to rise to senior positions, including on Executive Boards where they currently have a very limited presence.

Another critical matter is how to assist rural women to network: a powerful tool that will allow them to increase their presence in public forums and to deploy strategies for collective action. It also promotes their active participation in social and work life, enabling them to exercise their rights as citizens.

Moreover, the fact that rural women are particularly vulnerable to gender violence is a reality that cannot be overlooked. Spain's State Pact against Gender Violence,

which was unanimously approved by all levels of Parliament, contains specific measures to combat gender violence against this group. The measures address issues such as prevention and sensitization; institutional responses, coordination and networking; assistance, aid and protection for victims; healthcare; and knowledge-building, to name a few.

Undoubtedly, the sustainability of the rural environment is threatened by the same inequalities that continue to affect rural women. They are still fighting to improve their status and employment opportunities, and to increase their presence and active participation in the leadership bodies of companies, agricultural and trade associations, trade unions, professional organizations, and in political and social institutions.

We must break down the barriers that still prevent women from participating in our society at the same level as men, and multiply our efforts to overcome the stumbling blocks that are obstacles to equal opportunities in the rural world.

# Rural Woman in Sustainable Development

Let us work towards rural women being able to influence the construction of a better country

*Margarita Cedeño\**

An important aspect of the development of humankind and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is the relationship that exists between gender and food security, which are two important topics which, by themselves, guarantee a more prosperous future for humankind, but which, together, represent an area of strategic action for the wellbeing of the inhabitants of the planet.

Perhaps both topics might seem to be dissimilar for some persons; however, the participation of women in agriculture is of strategic interest because of its strong impact and direct benefits for the family.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has placed great emphasis on the importance of women as the cornerstone of the rural economy, especially for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

It is for this reason that the rural woman requires the wholehearted support of public policies in order to transition towards intensive and industrialized production; to have guarantees in the face of potential threats to her crop; and to be able to participate, equally, in production markets.

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A study that addresses this topic - published in 2012 by FAO – makes the following assertion: «The formulation and strengthening of public policies as well as the establishment of formal structures within the institutions that deal with rural issues, are proposed as solutions for resolving the aforementioned gaps, so that men and women receive equal treatment in the implementation of sustainable social projects and programs».

By analyzing some facts that we are aware of, and which reflect the serious situation of women in the rural economy, we realize that women have limited participation with respect to ownership of farms, and that whenever they become land owners, their plots are smaller and of lesser quality than those of the men. Similarly, the quality of the crops planted by the women is poorer because they do not have access to inputs and technologies as the men do, which limits their productive capacity.

Women are forced to involve their male children between 5 and 14 years in weeding, which results in an increase in the child labor indices. Women receive only 10% of the total assistance destined for agriculture, forest activities, and fishing, while they have less access to credit in comparison to men.

Consequently, the performance gap between male and female producers is between 20% and 30%, which is similar to the gap that exists in wages for men and women. If this gap were to close, the increase in female production could result in food production for 150 million people throughout the world.



*It is possible, with the decisive support of international organizations, to dispel the vulnerability of Latin American rural women, to transform the structures of power and social customs that, historically, have characterized rural areas, which leads these women to suffer double marginalization: for being women and for being rural. The opportunity for change that the 2030 Agenda offers us will serve to promote a new paradigm in rural development, the impetus of a society where rural women are not inferior or superior to men, but can cultivate the qualities that constitute their strength and value, a new rural woman capable of perfecting the community in which she lives.”*

It must also be mentioned that the indices for illiteracy are greater among rural women; and the average number of years of schooling is much lower than that for men. As the former Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, stated: «Collectively, rural women are a force for driving progress worldwide». Let us work towards using that strength to construct a better country, with equity and sustainability.

### **The matter of ethics**

Any reflection on an issue as important as food security cannot overlook the role of rural

women in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: rural women in Latin America and the Caribbean are a pillar of small-scale agriculture, of peasant work and of daily family subsistence.

We live in a world where the selfish use and exploitation of the resources placed at our disposal is of prime importance, which makes future life on planet Earth unsustainable, as Pope Francis reminds us in his encyclical “*Laudato si'*: On care for our common home”.

It is an insult to human dignity and an ethical problem that hundreds of millions of people are suffering from malnutrition and famine, while worldwide 1.3 billion tons of food are wasted each year-- enough to eradicate hunger.

Consequently, we must urgently embark on the task of promoting mechanisms that ensure the availability and enjoyment of an adequate diet, which is essential for human life and development, while taking care of the resources that make the existence of human beings on the planet possible.

This cannot be achieved without the involvement of half of the population, of women, who are the change agents, and most of all, it cannot be achieved without the participation of the women who work every day in the fields. Because without rural women there will be no food security.

The region has a comprehensive set of documents that reflect important agreements at the regional level, and which establish a road map towards the full integration of women in the production matrix.

One of them is the Montevideo Strategy, adopted within the framework of the thirteenth Regional Conference of ECLAC on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, which raises the value and recognition of the economic contribution of women’s agricultural work.

The profile of women, stated in the aforementioned document, suggests that the poorest families, more than 60% of which are headed by women, live on marginal lands and do not benefit from technological advances linked to the production of high-yielding varieties. These families do not have the necessary resources to acquire fertilizers, pesticides and fuel; they face great technical challenges that prevent them from entering the production and marketing chains, and are forced to work doubly hard in order to make progress.

### **Concern leads to action**

There is concern regarding food security, and difficulties that many encounter in obtaining food to ensure adequate nutrition for the population. This concern must lead to an action plan for working with rural women and should include strategies for supporting family members and linkages to developmental interventions, from the perspective of a community leadership and social inclusion of women.

In order to do this, it is necessary to promote family farming, vocational training, agricultural production, cooperative activity, financial inclusion and access to credit as poverty exit strategies that allow rural women to build their capacities for local resource-based enterprises and environmental sustainability.

It is also necessary to support the associative endeavors of women in greenhouse production, vermiculture, fish farming, fruit tree planting, food production and handicraft production.

All intervention strategies aimed at rural women should adopt a rights-based approach, focus on life cycles and prevention of violence against women.

As Mother Teresa of Calcutta said: *“Together we can do great things.”*

### **Empowering rural women for SDG**

It is now time to explore how the 2030 Agenda can serve to promote rural women and empower them to address the challenges they face.

The rural woman is a change agent who makes an enormous contribution that is currently invisible to the public and interest groups. Rural women today assume an excessive burden of caregiving activities without remuneration or recognition; they are exposed to greater inequalities and violence and their social value is lower than that of men.

The need to promote the importance of rural women as managers in the reconstruction of the social fabric of rural areas cannot be postponed.

In developing countries, rural women play an important role as food producers and income generators, a role that the FAO and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) consider vital for the future of humanity, and which they believe amounts to 45% of food production in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In response to this reality, it is the responsibility of the coordinating bodies to implement the SDGs in each country, supported by the institutions related to agriculture, to create the spaces for dialogue and participation necessary for identifying the actions required to empower rural women.

It is possible, with the decisive support of international organizations, to dispel the vulnerability of Latin American rural women, to transform the structures of power and social customs that, historically, have characterized rural areas, which leads these women to suffer double marginalization: for being women and for being rural.

The opportunity for change that the 2030 Agenda offers us will serve to promote a new paradigm in rural development, the impetus of a society where rural women are not inferior or superior to men, but can cultivate the qualities that constitute their strength and value, a new rural woman capable of perfecting the community in which she lives.

# Empowering Women in Rural Areas: Progress and Challenges in the Context of Agenda 2030

Now as never before, the  
world needs a powerful  
rural feminist movement

*Laura Chinchilla Miranda\**

In October, the international community will commemorate three dates that are crucial for understanding the current and future importance of the new aspects of the Global Agenda for Sustainable Development. Between October 15 and 17, the United Nations will observe, as it has done since 2008, the International Day of Rural Women, World Food Day and, finally, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. These three events are closely linked, not only from a chronological point of view, but more fundamentally by a common thread that recognizes the importance of women's work in the rural sphere and calls for the empowerment of rural women for food production, poverty eradication and efforts to combat inequality, in a particularly challenging environment, in order to attain the 17 major Sustainable Development Goals by the year 2030.

This new visibility of women's role in rural spaces, which is also evident in literature, cinematography, the scenic arts and the development of new lines of research in the social sciences and the humanities, has to do with a growing appreciation of their potential as agents who trigger economic development and investment, social change, environmental protection and many other

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impacts that are positive for the wellbeing of non-urban societies. At the regional level, these were precisely the most important conclusions reached at the Conference on Rural Women in Latin America and the Caribbean (Brasilia, 2014) and at the Thirteenth Regional Conference on Women (Montevideo, 2016), which implemented the Rural Women Campaign, an effort based on the exchange and dissemination of experiences, best practices, policies, innovative mechanisms and actions specifically aimed at strengthening the role of rural women, defending their rights and promoting their participation in the sustainable development of their environment.

In general terms, women represent 40% of the planet's productive force. Their involvement in the present and future economic activity of the world's nations is considered essential, given that the sectors which are decisive for competitive growth in developing countries depend, in large measure, on women's work. According to the World Bank, women own approximately 37% of all small and medium-sized businesses in the so-called emerging markets. This includes agribusiness enterprises, where many of the challenges faced by women in other economic activities are multiplied. At the same time, rural women account for up to two-thirds of the 800 million illiterate people on the planet.



*In the context of linking efforts with the Global Development Agenda, it is clear that we need to propose many initiatives. First of all, it is essential to promote the organization of rural women in cooperatives or associations to guarantee their equitable participation in decision making. Empowerment also means ensuring a growing participation and leadership of rural women in public decision making bodies at all levels. To achieve this objective, better indicators must be developed to measure the performance of public policies that focus on this issue, addressing the different forms of political and patrimonial violence against women and supporting their role in the processes of marketing and distribution of agricultural products."*

As is well known, the agrifood sector is strategic for the future of the world's population. By 2050, the global population will reach a staggering 9.6 billion people, which will imply a substantial increase in global demand for food. According to several estimates prepared by institutions such as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in order to satisfy that demand the world will need to increase its current food production by at least 70%. Therefore, it will be necessary not only to draw on the most important technological advances in recent decades but also to decisively adopt global public policies that promote women's empowerment, training, legal equality and conditions that are substantially better than those prevailing today, in which discrimination against women remains pervasive.



The levels of exclusion affecting women in rural settings tend to be considerably greater than those found in urban areas. Gender inequalities are especially entrenched and have deep historical and cultural roots in relation to issues such as land tenure - no more than 20% of the planet's arable land is owned by women - access to production resources and access to financial services. According to *Global Findex*, a database containing data from 148 countries on savings and credit, the proportion of bank account holders is lower among women than among men. In developing countries, women's access to credit is generally more restricted (at least 20% less access than men). Even if women are able to obtain a loan - which in several countries still requires them to have the authorization of a male family member - they have less access to other financial services such as savings, insurance and the digital means to administer their funds.

Furthermore, in rural areas there are cultural barriers that prevent women from owning cattle, making their own financial decisions or benefiting from government actions in the context of rural financing programs that appear to have been designed to meet the needs and requirements that are normally fulfilled by parents. According to FAO, reducing gender inequality in rural areas solely in relation to access to resources, services and employment, could boost agricultural production by more than 4%. This would help to reduce the number of people suffering from hunger by approximately 150 million. It is important to note that recent studies carried out in Latin America, Africa and South East Asia, show that women allocate a larger proportion of their incomes to the home and their families than men. This has major implications for rural areas where income disparities between genders, unemployment rates among women and the volume of unremunerated work they do reach even higher levels than in urban settings.

But empowering rural women also implies guaranteeing them full access to educational and training opportunities. The incorporation of rural women into formal education as well as their inclusion in technology workshops and cutting-edge agricultural training, has proven to be crucial in providing them with the skills and knowledge required to swell the ranks of a new generation of agricultural entrepreneurs, who are aware of the environment and the importance of renewable energies, determined to improve the quality of life of their communities and conscious of their role in guaranteeing food security. Fortunately, although there are still many formidable challenges to overcome in this regard, we are beginning to witness examples of success. In India, United Nations agencies facilitated training in solar technology for large groups of rural women so that they could apply this knowledge to light up their communities and use it in their crop fields. In Egypt, a new generation of microcredits for rural women who are heads of families is making an enormous impact, particularly since it is accompanied by training initiatives co-sponsored by the International Fund for Agricultural Development. And in Latin America, businesses operated by rural women have achieved increasingly important results in Costa Rica, Mexico, Brazil, Bolivia, Guatemala and Paraguay.

The linkage between rural women's work and food security also offers fertile ground for action. In subsistence agriculture and family agriculture, women play

an active role in the first stages of every production chain, from preparing the land and planting to collecting the harvest. However, they do so while suffering from a structurally disadvantageous position, since fewer than 40% of rural women over the age of 15 receive any income from this activity. According to a World Food Program (WFP) analysis, this situation is largely the result, on the one hand, of limited access to property and subsistence assets such as land and credit, as well as energy and water and, on the other hand, the fact that they are less involved in the marketing of agricultural products and associated processes such as transportation and distribution networks. Consequently, the FAO and other agencies have paid special attention to policies specifically aimed at closing these gaps. Even so, it is surprising that 43% of food production jobs in developing countries are occupied by women, which means that their work is instrumental for food security.

Since the publication of the United Nations Secretary General's report entitled "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges", in 2015, efforts in this regard have multiplied considerably. Recently, the Hunger Free Latin America and Caribbean Initiative, as part of a collaboration between the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) with authorities of the FAO and other regional agencies such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL), adopted the Plan for Food Security, Nutrition and Hunger Eradication 2025. This initiative has created a new awareness of these issues the region. For example, Guatemala has passed a new Family Agriculture Law that includes specific budgets to address gender inequalities. In Paraguay, the Public Policy Law for Rural Women adopts principles that ensure women's access to credit, land, markets and fair trade. In Colombia the Ministry of Agriculture has opened a new Office for Rural Women, while in Costa Rica the Gender Equality Plan contemplates mechanisms to give visibility and articulate demands and opportunities for the development of microenterprises for rural women.

Indeed, the Second Goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. The empowerment of women contributes directly to the fulfillment of this goal, as well as to the fulfillment of the Fifth Goal – to achieve gender equality. But it also contributes to another really fundamental objective, one that does not necessarily receive sufficient attention. I refer to the Third Goal of the Agenda, which is to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages. Specifically, it involves efforts to reduce maternal and child mortality. The vulnerability of rural women, in terms of their access to adequate medical services, is a fundamental barrier to the full exercise of their rights and is often an insurmountable obstacle to developing their full potential. Therefore, providing them with sufficient and specialized medical services must be a priority in every system that seeks to empower rural women.

But in the context of linking our efforts with the Global Development Agenda, it is clear that we need to propose many initiatives. First of all, it is essential to promote the organization of rural women in cooperatives or associations to

guarantee their equitable participation in decision making. Empowerment also means ensuring a growing participation and leadership of rural women in public decision making bodies at all levels. To achieve this objective, better indicators must be developed to measure the performance of public policies that focus on this issue, addressing the different forms of political and patrimonial violence against women and supporting their participation in the processes of marketing and distribution of agricultural products. It is worth emphasizing that rural women are not merely women farmers. Beyond agricultural activities, women are also a central and vital part of food production value chains and they establish and operate micro-enterprises.

No less important, however, is the task of ensuring their full participation in discussions to improve their situation undertaken by the international community, especially within the international organizations. Now, more than ever before, the world needs a powerful rural feminist movement. Let us contribute to this objective and to ensuring that the relationship between women and the land becomes the central pillar of this century's public policies.



# Challenges and Opportunities for Rural Women in Mexico

Indigenous regions have been  
bypassed by development to  
an appalling degree

*Nuria Costa Leonardo\**

In 2010, there were 28.1 million census households in Mexico. Some 6.1 million (21.9%) of them were in rural areas and made up of 25.8 million people—a quarter of the country's total population. These figures contrast sharply with those for 1950, when 14.8 million people lived in rural areas (57.4% of the total population).

In 2010, the indigenous population was put at 6,695,228 people—3,407,389 women (50.9%) and 3,287,839 men (49.1%). In absolute terms, this population group had increased by 1,412,881 in 1990, growing at an annual average rate of 2.2% over the same 20-year period.

According to the multidimensional measurement of poverty in Mexico carried out in 2012 by the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL), 45.5% of Mexicans are affected by multidimensional poverty. This figure includes 27.6 million women, 8.5 million of whom are rural dwellers.

Six out of 10 rural women (62.1%) are poor; more than 3 million live in extreme poverty and 5.5 million in moderate poverty. Most women living in extreme poverty are to

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Mexico

be found in rural areas, with 35.2% of the women affected by multidimensional poverty living in extreme poverty. This contrasts sharply with their urban counterparts, of whom only 15% of those affected by multidimensional poverty live in extreme poverty.

Another important aspect of the multidimensional measurement of poverty in Mexico is vulnerability due to social deprivation, defined by CONEVAL as lack of access to benefits such as education, health, social security, housing infrastructure, basic services and food.

It should also be noted that nine out of ten women in rural areas are affected by at least one of these manifestations of social deprivation, and almost half (46.9%) by at least three. Among the highest figures are those for lack of access to social security (81.2%), lack of basic housing services (57.4%) and lack of access to food (31.1%). In every case, the percentages are much higher in rural areas than they are in urban areas (INEGI 2014).

Indigenous regions have been bypassed by development to an appalling degree, and this is undoubtedly the area in which the Mexican state still has most work to do.

According to the National Program for the Development of Indigenous Peoples, in indigenous areas the number of doctors per thousand inhabitants is less than 0.1%, while the national average is 1.38%. The same applies to other types of deprivation, such as decent housing, access to water and electricity services, roads, etc. Paradoxically, most natural resources are to be found in indigenous territories, along with much of the priceless cultural wealth and worldview that we see reflected in the beautiful handicrafts to which we owe our identity.

According to the results of the 1997 National Survey of Employment in Indigenous Areas, 37% of people aged 15



*There are a number of reasons why Mexico's rural areas should be a primary focus of attention as producers of food: because of the growing food crisis; because of the natural resources and environmental services needed for development; because of the efforts to combat insecurity and the deterioration in our social fabric witnessed in many rural areas; because of the need to build rural territories that offer opportunities and a good quality of life, no longer simply areas responsible for the loss of human potential, with people migrating north or to the belts of poverty around the cities, where they become even more marginalized and add to the oft-mentioned "pending task" with regard to indigenous peoples. Women undoubtedly play a decisive but unappreciated role in each and every one of these facets of rural life."*

and over who spoke indigenous languages had no education at all, with women being the worst affected, while 45.8% of them had received no formal education. The situation was also serious among men, 28% of whom fell into the latter category.

The challenge is becoming more acute and the government is struggling to meet the needs of this population, spread as it is across more than 40,000 towns, nearly 14,000 of which have between 100 and 1500 inhabitants.

In the face of this social inequality, it is essential to identify the role and contribution of rural women in order to establish their true importance and raise the awareness of society and public policymakers and policy implementers in the sector, and the country as a whole. Rural and indigenous women are economic and social agents whose abilities, skills, contribution and rights oblige us to adapt development policies, adopting a gender vision and approach that ensures equitable treatment, thereby affording women more and better opportunities for participation and development.

The lack of information has not only limited the analysis of phenomena that affect women; it has also been a constraint to efforts to heighten society's awareness of the problems faced by rural and indigenous women, and the very urgent need to solve them. The solutions implemented must seek to harness the social energy of this segment of Mexico's rural population, adopting the vision of a state that facilitates an alternative development model, with public policies capable of meeting the challenge of underdevelopment in Rural Mexico in a sensitive and effective manner.

The approach to capacity building for the rural population should focus on promoting and supporting the functioning of organizational structures that allow women and men to interact at the microregional level, developing their capacity to influence and participate in interventions and decision-making mechanisms at various levels in which they both have a voice.

This leads us to the recognition that the best level for action and for mobilizing rural women is the territorial level, and that planning and management efforts should therefore be focused on the same level.

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A territorial vision of the development of Rural Mexico and, therefore, of our country, which is based on diversification and clusters of production, holds out highly promising prospects in terms of gender equity, because such an approach redraws the traditional productive hierarchy within and outside agriculture. The strengthening of women's participation at the territorial level provides a powerful stimulus for action and, above all, for increasing women's self-esteem and boosting their associative efforts and solidarity, enabling them to cease being passive agents and, instead, to take the initiative and serve as a force for bringing about changes in their position and condition.

### **Critical aspects that affect appropriate strategies**

The following is a summary of certain critical aspects that affect the design of appropriate strategies for rural women in Mexico:

- a) The lack of a vision and conceptualization of the territorial approach for the participation of women.
- b) Insufficient budgetary resources to invest in serious training, in gaining an understanding of what gender inclusion and development with a gender perspective means in actions with men and women, not just with women.
- c) The embryonic development of suitable, focused methodologies that facilitate participation and capacity building.
- d) The lack of coordination of training, productive investment, human development and personal capacity building, all of which go hand in hand and to which other elements could then be added to ensure true productive, social and political integration and coordination.
- e) The negligible and/or incorrect promotion of women's organizations, and the fear of transferring power to them.
- f) The inevitable dependence on bureaucratic processes and timeframes that not only result in time being lost due to delays in implementation, but also lead to the incompatibility or overlapping of the programs and policies of different institutions; in other words, the impossibility of achieving close inter- and intra-institutional linkages and coordination.
- g) The lack of analysis and evaluation of the results of public policies targeted at women.
- h) Paternalism and/or the clientelistic management of programs, not only on the institutional side but also among organizations claiming to represent rural women.



- i) The lack of understanding of, and failure to adapt policies to, the diversity of rural society and rural women themselves, which is particularly true in the case of indigenous peoples.

It is very important to highlight the question of the conservation and rational use of natural resources, along with the culture of environmental care and the development of capabilities for separating and making use of waste regarded as “garbage,” which highlights yet another face of the highly predatory and harmful poverty that exists in rural areas. Policies aimed at promoting this type of close coordination for territorial cohesion call for a gender perspective that makes it possible to promote conservation practices and the integrated and rational use of existing resources, the social rate of return, equal opportunities, institutional democratization processes and an understanding of the difference between quality of life and very harmful and predatory consumerist outlooks.

Territorial development requires that the State be a partner in territorial processes, and therefore respectful of them and effective in performing its own functions as the State in providing services, regulating the economy and strengthening the democratic culture.

In this sense, the application of the territorial approach should be based on the fact that investment aimed at ensuring equal opportunities is a principle and a community priority, and a strategic factor in active citizenship that reinforces the value of democracy.

We need to promote the territorial integration of the economic, social and cultural dimensions. This means applying a global vision to the many local solutions required in rural areas: 1) improve the quality of life; 2) increase the value added of local products; 3) attach greater value to and increase the care and use of local resources, based on care of the environment and existing ecosystems; 4) harness new knowledge and innovative technologies for diversification and multi-activity; 5) facilitate and promote processes of representative participation by the various segments of society; and, 6) make aspects of training and non-formal education a permanent fixture, to ensure productive and social integration into the workforce that revolutionizes recurring processes of marginalization.

### **Requirements for equal opportunities**

Some of the requirements for equal opportunities worth mentioning are as follows:

- Increased presence of rural women in development processes—under the umbrella of government structures as part of development programs, as project promoters or as the final beneficiaries of funds.

- Identification and elimination of the real discrimination suffered by rural women.
- Adaptation of working conditions to the needs of women and families and their businesses.
- Diversification of career options for families and women. Encourage their participation in emerging professions.
- Promotion of training-development as a criterion for rural women's acquisition of knowledge and their development of skills and abilities.
- Training of multiplier agents for processes that can be replicated.

## **Recommendations**

Based on all of the above, the following recommendations are made:

- Devise analysis frameworks and methodologies for gender mainstreaming and the territorial approach.
- Systematize and disseminate experiences and best practices, and concrete cases that demonstrate their feasibility and relevance.
- Develop methodologies for processes aimed at empowering women so they can influence policies and constructing alternatives for community development and attaching greater value to the rural milieu as an option that also offers a good quality of life.

## **Measures to be adopted**

It is necessary to adopt measures that will lead to results described in the following areas:

- a) Promotion of mechanisms for accessing assets keyed to the needs of the social actors and groups, including sustainable and culturally appropriate financing mechanisms, to foster productive entrepreneurship that generates employment and income.
- b) Operation of bodies that permit women to meet together and establish common ground at the local level, and mechanisms involving both women and men, to promote the exchange of experiences, reflection, training, mutual support, the monitoring and evaluation of their development processes and promotion of their transition to more developed associative and cooperative undertakings designed to strengthen local, self-managed initiatives for sustainable development.

- c) The adaptation of working conditions to women's needs with policies aimed at family participation and interaction, in order to strengthen the options for development and women's relationships with their menfolk and children.
- d) The strengthening of the autonomy of women entrepreneurs, to enable them to commission and control technical assistance and training.
- e) The permanent training of human capital and social capital.
- h) Promotion of a culture of shared responsibility and sustainability through saving schemes, capitalization, reinvestment and greater autonomy, among others.

Finally, the need for an approach based on recognition of the true importance of rural women and their contribution to our society is undoubtedly linked to the need for the State and society to acknowledge the true value of the rural milieu. Such an approach is also part of the urgent task of devising a different model of development in Mexico, underpinned by a commitment to new relationships of cooperation and linkages among the various sectors of society, with new tools designed to heal the wounds caused by inequity and injustice and raise awareness of the need for a harmonious, more loving world.

Recovering knowledge, values and natural and human resources in order to make more and better use of all our cultural diversity and biodiversity for sustainable and harmonious development is a task that cannot be postponed any longer, a task in which women have a key role to play.



# Inequality Is Our Greatest Challenge

Panama has one of the highest percentages of women agricultural producers in Latin America

*Isabel de Saint Malo de Alvarado\**

For 15 years, I worked for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), where I was able to witness, first hand, the importance of different sectors in national development. This was further reaffirmed when I led the Council of the National Concertation for Development (CCND), as we worked to prepare an inclusive road map to guide the country's long-term vision for development.

I welcome the opportunity to write about this topic, which ties together two objectives that have defined my professional career: achieving sustainable development as well as gender equity, in order to provide everyone with opportunities.

For me, gender equity is a priority at both a personal and professional level. Over and above justice, rights or social equilibrium, evidence shows that if the gender gap in the economy alone were to improve by 25%, the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) could increase by 5.3 billion dollars by 2025, according to the World Economic Forum. Improvements in the economy, along with equal opportunities, would guarantee a better distribution of wealth, which would bring us closer to closing alarming gaps with respect to poverty.

\* Former Vice  
President and  
Minister of  
Foreign Affairs,  
Republic of Panama

The fact that women are not able to aspire to the same positions as men is an open secret. Historically, women have been relegated to second-class status in society. It was not until the last century that women gained the right to receive an education, vote, hold public office and take maternity leave.

A clear example that demonstrates this lack of equity is women's implicit obligation to look after their homes and families, which means they have less time for professional development. The belief that this obligation should be imposed on a single gender continues to persist, despite the fact that sharing this obligation would benefit everyone.

For rural women, shared responsibility for household chores is a virtually inconceivable goal. Gender roles, imposed by their culture and society, are firmly implanted in this sector of the population; as a result, women are confined to the reproductive sphere and to the care of children and the elderly, duties for which they receive no remuneration.

Rural women face even more unfavorable situations than other women or those who work in rural areas.

Women head less than 25% of households, even though the number of rural households headed by women increased by 40%<sup>1</sup> between 2002 and 2014. Furthermore, three-quarters of these households are classified as inactive or

are involved in small-scale agriculture. All of this directly affects the economic situation of rural women, whose participation level is just 45%, compared to 81% in the case of rural men.

The agriculture sector in Panama represents a low percentage of the GDP; however, it is the sector that provides the greatest number of jobs. This demonstrates the sector's importance, and underscores the need to support the sector in order to strengthen it. To this end, this administration has promoted the "Panama Exports" program, which seeks to foster the diversification of Panama's agrifood exports and linkages



*The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an ideal context in which to prioritize rural women, a group that has lagged behind throughout history. At present, we possess the tools necessary to provide them with the opportunities they require to grow both personally and professionally. As we approach 2030, all governments, companies and citizens must ensure that their development is aligned with and prioritizes the 2030 Agenda, which incorporates rural women into all of its objectives, both directly and indirectly."*

1 ECLAC, FAO, IICA. 2017. The Outlook for Agriculture and Rural Development in the Americas: A Perspective on Latin America and the Caribbean.

between agricultural entrepreneurs and export markets through the provision of training opportunities, advisory services and technical assistance. The program's brand promotes a high-quality export culture, aimed at positioning Panamanian products in the international market with a seal of excellence.

Most rural women who carry out professional duties are involved in the agriculture sector. It is worth mentioning that Panama has one of the highest percentages of women agricultural producers in Latin America.

However, over the past decade, Panama has witnessed a significant upsurge in the incorporation of rural women into the labor market. Additionally, the duties that rural women carry out have become increasingly diverse as women have moved beyond the agriculture sector to take on different roles in the manufacturing industry, social services, trade, teaching, health, housekeeping and tourism.

### **Panamanian initiatives that benefit rural women**

In light of the challenges that rural women still face when striving to achieve personal and professional growth, the Republic of Panama has implemented several initiatives through different government institutions.

With respect to the empowerment of rural women, the Rural Development Directorate of the Ministry of Agricultural Development (MIDA) held the Fifth Latin American and Caribbean Meeting of Rural Women (ENLAC) in 2017, which sought to drive discussions on the main problems that affect rural women in Latin American and Caribbean countries. Some of the issues discussed were the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, the effects of climate change, the protection of rural women's human rights, and information and communication technologies (ICTs) as management and empowerment tools. MIDA, in turn, provides daily technical assistance to 200 organizations of rural women in Panama. The Project for the Transfer of Opportunities opens doors for rural women with limited resources in order to reduce poverty levels.

On the other hand, the Gender Office of the Ministry of Labor and Social Development (MITRADEL), together with the National Institute for Women (INAMU) and other institutions, have organized various training and awareness-raising workshops for women in rural communities and areas. The training sessions address a number of topics, including soft skills for artisans, the narrowing of gender gaps, self-esteem, empowerment, cost and investment, preparation of business plans, human talent development, sexual and reproductive health, healthy lifestyles, and primary healthcare. The objective of these workshops is to provide training to women micro-entrepreneurs in order to strengthen their economic autonomy, enabling them to exceed production for self-consumption and, instead, channel production toward markets.

INAMU and MITRADEL implemented the initiative entitled "*Tú puedes mujer*" ("Women: you can"), which trains women in vegetable farming, how to launch

their own businesses, and how to process fish and shellfish. Together with the Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise Authority (AMPYME), INAMU is also implementing the “Creating opportunities for women” project, which seeks to train rural women in matters related to business plans. Upon completing the training program, women are able to apply for seed capital to launch their first businesses.

Governments must implement public policies that are geared toward narrowing gender gaps; they must also involve women in policymaking and facilitate their participation in political leadership. We must undertake efforts to ensure that women acquire more property rights and greater access to credit and funding opportunities; to increase women’s participation in production chains and the distribution of products; and to support the strengthening of rural women’s organizations, among other necessary actions. These public policies must also take into account the specific characteristics of rural and indigenous women, such as their language, education, culture, traditions and beliefs, without limiting their access to technologies and infrastructure, in order to guarantee greater productivity and quality.

The results of the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) study carried out in Panama in 2017 revealed that 19% of the population lives in a state of poverty, which is particularly prevalent in rural and indigenous areas, where women are the most affected by traditions such as marriage, starting a family at a young age, ethnic discrimination and limited access to education, which result in greater poverty and marginalization. Although the MPI shows that the poverty rate has dropped by a few percentage points, we acknowledge the fact that we still have a long way to go, not only at the national level, but also at a regional level. Inequality is our greatest challenge, but we have the capacity to overcome it and we have already taken concrete steps in that direction.

Projects aimed at increasing access to quality education and healthcare services have been prioritized in rural areas, in addition to the development of infrastructure to facilitate market access for women’s products.

Interinstitutional programs promote the financial inclusion of women in the rural sector, providing them with the tools they need to carefully manage their resources. In this way, by the time they begin to generate income, they are able to save money and carry out financial planning while making their own decisions, leading to investments that strengthen their businesses and, in turn, guarantee their sustainability and provide access to a better quality of life.

### **Gender equity in the 2030 Agenda**

The 17 goals and 169 targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development express the interest in achieving gender equity, reducing poverty and providing better living conditions for everyone. I am a firm believer that any progress toward the fulfilment of Goal 5 (“achieve gender equality and empower all women and



girls”) will bring us closer to achieving the other 16 goals. Women represent 50% of the population; it would be impossible to achieve the 2030 Agenda without the active participation of half of the population. It is critical for all stakeholders in society, including women, to participate in order to accelerate sustainable development.

The 2030 Agenda also seeks to eradicate the poverty, as established by Goal 1: “end poverty in all its forms everywhere.” Rural women in particular fall prey to poverty due to their vulnerability. The achievement of these objectives with special emphasis on these groups seeks to achieve equity in all areas, through access to resources and services. Rural women’s conditions of vulnerability have caused them to experience high levels of poverty. Women’s susceptibility to poverty is disproportionately high compared to men, which is further proof of the need to achieve gender equity.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an ideal context in which to prioritize rural women, a group that has lagged behind throughout history. At present, we possess the tools necessary to provide them with the opportunities they require to grow both personally and professionally.

As we approach 2030, all governments, companies and citizens must ensure that their development is aligned with and prioritizes the 2030 Agenda, which incorporates rural women into all of its objectives, both directly and indirectly.

I dream of a world in which women have the same opportunities as men, in which they are not discriminated against for being women, and in which their future is not defined by their gender, but rather by their merits. I am certain that this dream can become a reality, as long as we all contribute to its achievement.



# The Unreported Alliance Between Vogue, IICA and Women 20

Portraying the strength and challenges of our rural women

*Daniela Falcão\**

Vogue Brazil is synonymous with style, catwalks, beauty and also lifestyles. We know women and we try to give them information that will help them to live better in the truest sense of the word. We depict modern life from different perspectives... Our pages portray women who are changing the world, their world, in small ways or through major transformation.

We have always done this, and we will continue to do so in all our editions, and in every edition.

Our readers are satisfied, which is something that the 1.1 million members of our virtual community tell us every day. And since we in the editorial world can never shy away from new challenges, we have decided to take on a new one: to turn the spotlight on the female force that feeds the world, by giving a voice and presence to rural women in Latin American and Caribbean countries.

To do so, we have forged an alliance with the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and with Women 20, a group that is seeking to impact the G20 agenda, in a bid to realize the so-called Sustainable Development Goals. This is an objective to which the entire planet should commit.

\* Managing Director  
Edições Globo  
Condé Nast  
Brasil

This partnership is special and has gone unreported. For the first time, Vogue Brazil is joining forces with an organization of the Inter-American System – IICA – and with a group of women who are striving to influence development policies within the framework of the G20, which is a key global forum for economic, financial and political cooperation and public policy coordination.

One purpose unites us: to portray, call attention to and strengthen the role of women in Latin America and the Caribbean’s rural areas.

Why? Because even in the absence of incentives or infrastructure, women are responsible for half of the world’s food production. Because they draw on the knowledge that their ancestors have passed down from generation to generation to maintain their families and to participate in our countries’ food markets.

That is the reason that we have combined efforts: to provide more forums and development opportunities for women in a world that has been historically dominated by men, even as we recognize the effectiveness and impact of this female force that is growing day by day.

Vogue Brazil, with IICA’s support, will give a voice, to these key players in the massive Latin American agricultural market. We are preparing special reports and photo essays to depict the lifestyles, needs and achievements of rural women in four countries: Brazil, Guatemala, Jamaica and Argentina.

We will turn the lights and lenses of our cameras on the lives of our women leaders. We will portray the living legacy of past generations – the adversities, values and regional folklore that are the foundation of this poignant female presence in rural areas.



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Our articles will speak to development, culture, the economy and sustainability.

Even as I write this note for the book on rural women around the world, commissioned to us by IICA, Vogue journalists are writing reports and taking pictures.

We travelled to four countries, trying to capture the angles, lighting and scenes that would best depict daily life, while at the same time we were preparing a portfolio of photographs that we plan to present to global political, social and economic leaders.

We would like to become a part of this world that is aspiring to achieve greater levels of development.

We believe that the role of rural women and the recognition of their contribution should be given priority in G20 and W20 agendas. We believe that it is important to promote initiatives that guarantee inclusion and the capacity development of women through financial incentives and access to technology. We believe that there should be more opportunities and a greater variety of forums that allow women to play a decisive role, and provide women from rural areas with a sustainable and equitable environment.

In attempting to depict the living conditions of women in the countryside, Vogue Brazil is trying to tell the world that the current scenario, characterized by limited access to resources and services, should be changed.

Recognition, development, rights, empowerment, legacy... these are key words in this novel and unreported effort that Vogue Brazil is undertaking with such enthusiasm.

Vogue Brazil is supporting IICA in calling for sound and long-term public policies that address the welfare of women who live in rural areas. The more vulnerable these women are, the greater the social consequences.

Our support is testimony to the true meaning and enormity of IICA's appeal to mass media to commit itself to an issue that we cannot afford to omit from the public agenda.



# Empowering the “Force of Nature”: International Policy Coordination for Global Recognition of Rural Women

Rural women must continue  
to be a focus of the W20  
in order to impact the G20

*Angela Joo-Hyun Kang\**

**H**ow many people think of farmers when they have a cup of tea or coffee, or drink a glass of wine, or enjoy a good meal? Only a small number of people, I guess. When it comes to female farmers, even fewer.

This article is a tribute to rural women who contribute immensely to the food security of humankind, but who face even more disadvantages in comparison to rural men and urban women. Here I offer my reflections after attending a roundtable meeting for the advancement of rural women in Argentina and suggestions for international policy coordination in global governance by recognizing and empowering rural women, or who I prefer to call “the force of nature,” who help us connect more closely with Mother Earth.

\* Founder and  
Executive President  
Global  
Competitiveness  
Empowerment  
Forum (GCEF)  
A B20 member and  
a W20 Delegate of  
Republic of Korea

## **W20’s Choice of the Policy Topic ‘Inclusion of Rural Development’**

Argentina assumes the presidency of the G20 in 2018. The key theme of the 2018 G20 is “Building Consensus for Fair and Sustainable Development”, with three key priority issues: the future of work, infrastructure for development,

and a sustainable food future. By chairing the G20 in 2018, Argentina is seeking to shed new light on the future of sustainable agriculture. W20, which is the G20's policy recommendation group of women, added rural development to its three existing topics of financial, digital, and labor inclusion. Considering the critical role of rural women in agriculture and food security, W20 Argentina's decision is very meaningful.

W20 Argentina hosted four roundtable meetings for each topic in order to develop policy recommendations by issuing four communiqués. These will be merged into one final communiqué at a writing session involving all G20 member country delegates on October 1, 2018. The final version will be submitted to G20 leaders at the W20 Argentina 2018 Summit on October 2-3, 2018 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The roundtable for rural development chaired by UN Women was held at the Sheraton Hotel on August 3, 2018 in Salta, Argentina. It was my great pleasure to participate in this roundtable in person as the only non-American delegate, excluding those from Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and the United States.

The meeting, opened by Ms. Susana Balbo, Chair of the W20, featured four expert presentations by the following: Mr. Jan Weetjens, Practice Manager of Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean Region at World Bank; Ms. Lara Balance, Deputy Regional Director at UN Women Regional Office for Americas & Caribbean; Ms. Elisabet Golerons, Gender Focal Point of FAO Argentina; and Mr. Jorge Werthein, Special Advisor to the Director General of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA).

### **The Challenges of Recognizing and Empowering Rural Women in G20 Policies**

Through consensus-based policy recommendation dialogues among all delegates, experts, public and private sector leaders, and representatives from civil society, the W20 Argentina 2018 Communiqué on Rural Women was adopted with five recommendations: guaranteeing investment and improvements in infrastructure services; land-related legal, institutional and technical measures; access to gender- and cultural-sensitive social services; full and effective participation in decision-making processes; and statistical

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systems with quantitative and qualitative sex- and age-disaggregated data on the status of rural women, including various concrete actions such as the creation of a 2030 Rural Women Global Fund.

However, these are not easy tasks since there are many difficult challenges ahead. As Ms. Susana Balbo, Chair of the W20, highlighted in her opening remark, W20 Argentina 2018 is the first occasion on which the development of rural women is being addressed within the W20 framework. Advocacy for gender-based policies is hard to implement. Recognizing policies focused on rural women will be even more difficult.

Since the topic is important not only in the Americas but also in other G20 countries around the globe, there should be measures to ensure continuity in future W20 presidencies and to ensure it has a great impact on the G20 agendas.

Diversity of rural women, who account for 43% of the world's agricultural workforce -- especially indigenous, Afro-descendant, migrant, and peasant women -- considering its interconnectedness with financial, digital, and labor inclusion as well as the complexity of the policies, may help mutual understanding between policy makers, implementers, and advocates.

It would be worthwhile for G20 countries to work together to identify common challenges and possible solutions while considering their historical, political, cultural, economic, social and environmental contexts involving rural women. We all have to combine our wisdom, enthusiasm, commitment, and advocacy by identifying and sharing good practices to mobilize strong voices to make rural women more visible, recognizable, and empowered as a force of nature that is nurturing humankind.

### **Examples from the Republic of Korea on Recognizing and Empowering Rural Women**

In the Republic of Korea (South Korea), the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF) is involved in overseas planning and coordination of policies on women, family, and youth.

The South Korean government has supported rural women since 1990 through its policy entitled "Project for Income Generating Activities of Rural Women." Under this policy, the state supports women leaders running farming households become women entrepreneurs of small-scale food processing businesses. A more comprehensive policy to help rural women become entrepreneurs came through the Support of Female Farmers and Fishermen Act, enacted on July 1, 2002.

Recently, MOGEF analyzed rural women policies, jointly with the Korea Rural Economic Institute and the Korean Women's Development Institute, based on the Gender Impact Analysis and Assessment Act, enacted on March 16, 2012, and discovered a decrease in the number of programs supporting rural women among

existing policies and an absence of focus on rural women in the formulation of new policies for rural development.

“The Project for Income Generating Activities of Rural Women” was a project exclusively for rural women, but in 2016, it was changed to a gender-neutral project offering technical assistance for small-scale entrepreneurship of both men and women in rural areas. Moreover, the percentage of women beneficiaries dropped from 57% in 2016 to 43% in 2017.

In the Act on Fostering and Supporting Rural Convergence Industry, enacted on June 4, 2015, rural women should be given priority support in terms of funding and training for the 6th industry, which refers to the convergence activity related to rural agriculture, encompassing the 1st, 2nd and 3rd industries. However, no such policies can be found in the first Basic Plan for the 6th Industry Development (2016-2020), based on the Act on Rural Convergence Industry.

According to the Gender Impact Analysis and Assessment Act, which empowers MOGEF to conduct an analytical policy evaluation of gender impact and make binding policy recommendations to the related ministries and institutions for modifications and improvements, MOGEF advised the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs as well as its Rural Development Administration Agency, to prepare measures to boost the participation of rural women in the project offering technical assistance to small entrepreneurship in rural areas and to initiate an incubation project and support funds for start-ups by rural women.

MOGEF also advised that rural women be considered positively in the evaluation criteria for the 6th Industry Certification System, through which the South Korean government grants certification to qualified rural professionals, agricultural corporations, agricultural production associations, social enterprises, and cooperatives that fall within the 6th industry. It also guarantees various benefits such as consulting, funding, market channels, and favorable treatment in other projects like the Rural Area Industry Support Project and the Rural Resource Composite Industry Project. For example, if women legally represent entities or if the percentage of women employees goes beyond a certain level, the applicant will receive additional points in the certification evaluation.

The ministries and institutions that received policy recommendations have to take measures for improvements and must submit a relevant legal review and a revised budget plan by August 2019.

The South Korean government’s policies of recognizing and empowering rural women in other countries are implemented by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) through official development assistance (ODA) policies, covering areas of education, health, governance, agriculture & rural development, water, transportation, energy, STI (science, technology, and innovation), gender equality, and climate change response. These policies are linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda approved

by the United Nations. The consideration of rural women is reflected mainly in agriculture & rural development as well as gender equality areas and partially in education and health areas.

### **The Importance of International Policy Coordination for Rural Women in G20 and non-G20 countries**

The G20 Meeting of Agriculture Ministers was held on July 27-28, 2018 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Through a joint declaration, G20 Agriculture Ministers acknowledged the important roles of farming families, smallholders, women, and young people in their fight against food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms. The ministers emphasized coherent policy frameworks that create an enabling environment for their sustainable agriculture and entrepreneurship, discussed potential opportunities and impacts -- addressing scientific, technological, institutional, commercial, and trade related aspects --, and recognized the importance of responsible investment through the application of internationally accepted principles and good practices for those groups.

To make policies for rural women more visible in global policy platforms, G20 could initiate a fact-finding study to explore joint ways to identify existing policies for rural women, identify common challenges, and generate collaborative solutions.

The first step would be to identify other countries' policies that recognize and empower rural women, such as in South Korea.

The second step would be to compare policies among different countries. In this step, there should be a link between G20 and non-G20 countries on each continent. This inter-continental policy comparison can be used for policy dialogue, analysis, and exchange. This can be developed further as a bridge for policy transfers and support networks connecting G20 and non-G20 countries on different continents.

The third step is to accelerate bilateral and multilateral ODA policies of G20 and non-G20 countries including their public and private partnerships with like-minded companies in all forms.

After connecting national as well as inter and intra continental policies, the final step would be to expand into other policy areas, such as gender-conscious global trade for fair and sustainable development for rural women in global agricultural supply chains.

All possible steps could play an important role as drivers for influencing high quality public and private policies of governments and corporations by taking rural women's contributions into their policy making considerations, with the perspectives of country social responsibility, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and global social responsibility.

## **The Consensus of Empowering Rural Women, the “Force of Nature”**

In all possible steps, inter-continental consideration could play a key role in policy dialogue, analysis, exchange, transfer, and coordination between G20 and non-G20 countries, given the issue’s global, glocal and local nature.

The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) is a good example, not only by promoting national policy collaboration among its 34 Member States but also by enhancing regional cooperation between G20 and non-G20 countries. IICA’s efforts have been coordinated through ministerial meetings between the Americas. IICA’s instrumental role is also reflected in the agricultural policy agenda in the Summits of the Americas.

IICA’s extensive expertise in recognizing and empowering rural women throughout the Americas would help other regions such as Africa and the Asian Pacific region. For example, it could initiate in-depth policy identification, analysis, and comparison of policies for rural women in the Americas and advance cross-continental policy exchange initiatives, which can contribute to SDGs globally.

IICA can also collaborate with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to establish safeguard policies focused on rural women, such as the Environmental and Social Performance Standards of the International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank Group. IICA and IDB could support other multilateral development banks in similar efforts and mobilize global endeavors to maximize the contributions of rural women across the globe.

There is a saying that one enthusiastic person is better than 100 people with lukewarm interest. I saw many enthusiastic people in Salta, Argentina, with passionate spirits. All are fully committed to helping the voices of rural women to be better heard.

My first-ever trip to Salta, Argentina, and South America is unforgettable, not only because I met wonderful people with strong commitment, but also because I was able to envision there being more such people around the world. All we have to do is believe in ourselves and let the force of nature be with us, guide us and connect us.

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# Rural Women – A Gender Perspective

Rural women are instrumental to the European Union’s aims of zero hunger and the eradication of poverty

*Mara Marinaki\**

Gender equality and the empowerment of women is a core priority for the European Union (EU). In 2015, the EU adopted a new transformational framework for addressing gender equality in EU External Relations and its institutional culture, called the Gender Action Plan 2016–2020 (GAP II). The UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, which forms the basis for the EU’s development cooperation agenda, has a transversal gender-mainstreaming policy while one specific goal (SDG 5) is dedicated to achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls. The GAP II responds to this goal.

Furthermore, global food and nutrition security is high on the EU agenda. Rural women, whose roles and responsibilities are multiple and complex, are key actors in the production, processing and marketing of food, as well as in preparing food for household consumption, and maintaining household nutrition security. They carry the potential to increase productivity, thereby raising incomes, and the knowledge required to diversify their livelihoods in times of stress. In short, rural women are instrumental to the EU’s aim of zero hunger and the eradication of poverty. Despite their large untapped potential, rural

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women face many barriers to increasing agricultural productivity and achieving food and nutrition security for their families. They have less access than men to productive resources, less information, and are less able to make decisions on their own. Their reproductive role means that women and girls are more at risk from nutrition insecurity than men and boys.

Rural women account for the production of half of the world's food, and up to 80% of production in most developing countries. Estimations show that 7 out of 10 of the world's hungry people are women. Also, women own less than 15% of land worldwide, and less than 2% of property in the developing world; while they do two-thirds of the world's work, they only receive 10% of the world's income. That is why gender inequality is not just a problem of women, but it is a problem of agricultural productivity, of food security and rural development. Rural women are not a homogeneous group. Their roles and contributions to the society differ, as well as their needs and interests, depending on their age, origins, the size and composition of their family and age of their children. A constant feature is nevertheless discrimination, albeit varying in degree. Global policy put gender equity as a strategic objective, and the rural development policies of the EU put the gender mainstreaming into the directive which governs the European Common Agricultural Policy as well as the Rural Development Programme.



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At the heart of these inequalities lie gender-discriminatory social norms – reflected in attitudes, behaviours, policies and laws that hold women and girls back. This is why the GAP II calls for a transformative approach, which seeks not only to improve women's access to resources, but also to guarantee their equal rights. It goes without saying that a transformative approach towards improving the lives of rural women and girls in the agriculture, food and nutrition security sectors must be accompanied by efforts in other sectors to guarantee their rights, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

In order to bring about this social transformation, we need evidence-based and systematic gender analysis through carefully collected sex-disaggregated data, in order to



explore the discriminatory trends that disadvantage women. The roles of rural women in agriculture, food security and nutrition chains in the developing world are complex and vary depending on many different factors such as their socioeconomic status, geographic location, age, reproductive status, education, religion or ethnicity. Generalisations run the risk of oversimplifying the stories of rural women's lives. In addition, past and emerging trends such as climate change, migration, disease outbreaks, commercialisation, and an increase in technologies, globalisation and conflict, can alter the behaviours of both men and women.

Women are normally the main care-providers for children, the elderly and the sick. Many believe that this undervalued care work, within the reproductive economy, keeps women poor and that the value of this unpaid work needs to be assessed and properly recognised. However, it should be emphasised that rural women's knowledge about the natural environment, their habitat and natural resources, means that they play an important role in household resilience and are critical in the drive towards increased climate-smart agriculture. Where opportunities are available to them, rural women can be resourceful entrepreneurs, able to manage successful agri-businesses that provide an important income for household food and nutrition security. Women's agricultural and entrepreneurial roles complement their roles as food and nutrition providers. Their contribution to child nutrition begins during pregnancy, as undernutrition often starts in the womb, and continues through breastfeeding and throughout the child's life. Their dominance in subsistence agriculture, as opposed to more male-dominated cash crops, means that they are guardians of household food security, and generally in charge of cooking and preparing family meals. In poor rural households, whose income and food security can be affected by shocks such as price volatility, droughts, floods, natural catastrophes or conflict, women may be forced to devise short-term measures to feed their families, such as local displacement, migration or the sale of livestock.

Rural women and girls are also the main collectors of fuelwood for cooking and water for drinking, domestic use and for animals. These may be heavy tasks involving frequent and unsafe journeys away from home, which may grow longer as natural resources become ever more depleted. As a result of their multiple roles as food providers and domestic carers, rural women often lack the time for more productive activities. This trend is commonly referred to as women's 'work burden' or their 'time poverty'. Rural women's roles are affected both positively and negatively by the ongoing rural transformation that is happening in developing countries around the world. A process of social change is under way as rural economies diversify, reduce their reliance on agriculture, gain greater access to information through information and communications technology, strengthen their links to urban areas, and become more mobile – especially through the migration of young males. This change can empower rural women as they adopt greater on- and off-farm responsibilities whilst men move into non-farm employment or migrate away in search of alternative incomes. On the other hand, more responsibilities may also increase rural women's heavy work burden and leave them with even less time for them and their families.

## **Why land/property rights matter for women**

Generally speaking, if women can increase their access to, control over, and management and use of, land; this will have a positive impact on their lives and on the wellbeing of their families and communities. It will also provide a long-term benefit to their country and society at large.

Secure land/property rights contribute to the realisation of fundamental human rights. Women's equal access to land helps guarantee the respect of fundamental human rights, including the rights to adequate food, shelter, non-discrimination and equality; the right not to be evicted; and the right to effective remedy, etc. Moreover, secure land/property rights can help protect women from violence.

Evidence suggests that women's ownership of property, and their participation in land management, is associated with an increased ability to leave violent relationships; secure tenure provides economic security, particularly for vulnerable women, such as those who are widowed, elderly, divorced or affected by HIV/AIDS.

Secure land rights could contribute to increased farm investments and improved agricultural productivity. It is recognised that more empirical evidence is needed to measure the positive relation between secure land tenure and agricultural productivity. However, there is a high level of agreement that having secured rights is a critical factor favouring agricultural productivity, together with other elements that are often strictly linked to the availability of secured land, such as (among others) access to credit, input supplies, technology and extension services.

As women face more constraints than men to have secured land, they have more difficulties than men in making choices over its effective and productive use. Women for example are often constrained in their choice of crop, with men tending to use more productive land for the cultivation of higher-value cash crops.

Moreover, women might have more limited access to labour, lack of knowledge and availability of appropriate technologies, and a heavy workload resulting in time constraints that can further hamper their productivity. If women can effectively enjoy secure access to land and are given more say over which crops to grow, what inputs to use, what to sell, and how to spend or invest the revenues, their work could contribute to improved farm investments and agricultural productivity and, eventually, to increased gains from land.

Therefore, secure land/property rights are fundamental to improving food security and nutrition and can improve household food and nutrition security, as well as family investments. There is evidence that women with more secure land/property rights will reallocate family expenditure to better food consumption and other basic needs, for example by contributing to an improvement in the health and nutritional status of their children.

Secure land rights can improve women's voices and participation. Women in rural areas, especially those living in more traditional societies, are often dependent on male decisions. They may lack the right to vote or to participate in community decisions because they are not considered as qualified community members. Even in communities that do include women in common decision-making, women's right to vote can be undermined by procedural rules, such as those allowing only one vote per family (thus automatically going to the –usually male- household head). Removing barriers to participation and strengthening women's voices is fundamental in helping them defend their rights, both within communities and also when external factors/actors challenge community lands.

Among these external factors, the phenomenon of (large- scale) land acquisition (land grabbing) by non-community actors – either domestic or international – claiming land for commercial purposes represents a particularly critical challenge especially for indigenous women, who struggle to have their rights recognised. Although the impact varies from one context to another, it is broadly agreed that women are more likely to be negatively affected than men by this phenomenon because they are generally more vulnerable as a group. In these circumstances, women are often excluded from consultations and negotiations regarding land deals. Moreover, in cases where community land is redistributed following the concession of a part of it, women are more likely than men to be excluded from this redistribution or to be given the less productive parcels of land.

If women can enjoy a more secure right to land, they can improve their ability to exercise both 'voice' and 'choice' in decisions that affect the use and control of their own land and/or community land. Meaningful participation must, however, go beyond women's simple presence at meetings: meaningful participation includes women having both the space and knowledge to speak safely and the confidence and capacity to defend their rights. The more women are informed of their rights, the more they are able to participate.

To conclude, the EU remains a strong partner and global leader for gender equality, women's empowerment and sustainable development within, as well as outside of the EU, including women in rural areas in both spheres. This is a matter important not only for these women but for their families, communities and countries.

### **Addressing Gender-based Violence with the Spotlight Initiative**

In September 2017, the EU and the UN launched jointly the Spotlight Initiative, with an initial investment of EUR 500 million. Its goal is to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls around the world. Rural women are sometimes disproportionately exposed to the risks of gender-based violence, from infanticide, to femicides, brutal rapes and killings as well as harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage as well as domestic and family violence, trafficking in human beings and sexual and economic (labour) exploitation.

The EU has already identified the regions in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Pacific and the Caribbean where our targeted actions, projects, will be conducted, we have identified the most prevalent forms of violence that need to be tackled and now we are translating these policies into select country-related programs, working together with local government, civil society and other key stakeholders.

The Spotlight initiative is about taking violence out of the shadow and into the spotlight, addressing it in all its manifestations around the world. With a goal to create a world in which all women and girls can feel empowered to walk free and tall in safety and dignity.

# The Opportunities for Transformation Open Up When Women Have Land Rights

Rural women and girls are far from the public or media spotlight, but their struggles deserve urgent attention

*Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka\**

The 62nd Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62), held in March 2018, focused on the empowerment of women and girls in rural areas, signifying international commitment to fight some of the biggest challenges of our time: poverty, inequality, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and an end to violence against women and girls, no matter where they live, or how they live, so that we leave no one behind. Rural communities and the women and girls who live and work in them are often far from the public or media spotlight, but their struggles deserve urgent attention.

Addressing the specific challenges faced by rural women and girls in all their diversity, and opening their lives to the opportunities before them, means first and foremost making their needs and priorities more visible. Only then can they fully realize their human rights – to an adequate standard of living, to a life free of violence and harmful practices, to education and health, inclusive of sexual and reproductive health and rights, and to food security, nutrition, productive assets and to land.

In fact, land rights are key to gender equality and women's empowerment across an array of development issues. The

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Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with their strong interlinkages, reaffirm this connection, with multiple goals explicitly referencing the importance of secure access to land for both men and women, including Goal 1 on eliminating poverty, Goal 2 on food security and Goal 5 on gender equality. Land rights and gender equality also relate to Goal 11 on sustainable cities and Goal 16 on peace and justice, and to Goal 15 on life on land, which is especially relevant to the rights of rural women who often depend on communal resources like forests for fuel, water and food to provide for their families.

When it comes to land rights, gender inequality is often at its starkest. Globally, women represent only 13% of agricultural land holders, according to the FAO Gender and Land Rights Database. In turn, the OECD Social Institutions and Gender

Index showed that in only 37% of 161 countries worldwide do women and men have equal rights to own, use and control land. In 59% of those countries, while the law guarantees women and men the same rights, customary and religious practices often discriminate against women and undermine the full implementation of national legal codes. In the remaining 4% of those countries, women explicitly have no legal right to own, use or control land.

Rural women in many contexts depend on common resources like forests, water and community pastures for the elements needed for household subsistence -- food, firewood and fodder for livestock, for example. The use of these resources is often governed by a gendered division of labor, in which women and girls are primarily responsible for fuel and water collection, food processing, cooking and ensuring household nutrition -- unpaid care work that goes unrecognized and uncounted.

When women are kept behind to help with the collection of firewood, water and food they



*In order to support women farmers, we need to know more about the challenges they face. That means collecting data that is disaggregated by sex and other distinguishing characteristics on a range of issues and activities, including men's and women's activities and household responsibilities, as well as land and resource management and governance.*

*We need to have the numbers to understand and make visible the scope of the problem and the women and girls involved. For example, across the world's developing countries, as much as 70% of land is unregistered. This leaves those who make a living on the land, especially women, vulnerable to dispossession or displacement through expropriation and land grabs -- with little or no compensation. At UN Women, we are committed to collecting data on and talking about barriers like this in order to advocate for rural women's land registration and land title certification, regardless of their marital status."*

also lose critical opportunities to pursue education, paid work, leadership and leisure activities. In the case of girls, research from UNICEF shows that, globally, girls aged 5–14 spend 550 million hours every day on household chores --160 million more hours than boys their age spend -- which can compromise their school attendance and time for other activities. And when public or common land is privatized -- legally or illegally -- or as resources become scarce due to climate change, this time and effort dedicated to unpaid care work increases. So does the risk of violence. The longer the journey to find scarce resources, the greater the chance of exposure to sexual violence as well as physical exhaustion.

To understand the challenges to the rights of women in rural areas, it is worth looking in detail at smallholder farmers. Most of the one billion people worldwide who continue to live in poverty are heavily concentrated in rural areas. They are predominantly smallholder farmers or agricultural workers who work in the informal economy and have little social protection. This is especially true for women farmers who, lacking pensions, health insurance or paid sick leave, are left exposed to unsafe working conditions, precarious income security and a greater likelihood of an impoverished old age. Women farmers face many of the same challenges as their male counterparts, like barriers to accessing information, technology, financing and markets, but are even less likely to have the necessary land, credit, tools, weather and climate information and other resources. So, while they work just as hard as their male counterparts, they tend to be less productive.

As climate change brings droughts, flood and land degradation to their regions, the risks to food security and agricultural productivity are all the more acute. Women's knowledge of farming practices and land use, together with natural resource management techniques, are critical for confronting looming climate and environmental degradation challenges.

In order to support women farmers, we need to know more about the challenges they face. That means collecting data that is disaggregated by sex and other distinguishing characteristics on a range of issues and activities, including men's and women's activities and household responsibilities and land and resource management and governance. We need to have the numbers to understand and make visible the scope of the problem and the women and girls involved. For example, across the world's developing countries, as much as 70% of land is unregistered. This leaves those who make a living on the land, especially women, vulnerable to dispossession or displacement through expropriation and land grabs -- with little or no compensation. At UN Women, we are committed to collecting data on and talking about barriers like this in order to advocate for rural women's land registration and land title certification, regardless of their marital status.

It is vital to promote women's and girls' access to justice and legal support. Without this, rural women face not only the challenge of unequal access to land but lack of knowledge of their rights or the means to fight against having the land they depend on taken from them should they become divorced or widowed. Indeed, in one in five countries with available data, female surviving spouses do not have the same inheritance rights as their male counterparts. Even where the

laws are responsive to women's rights, greater effort is often needed to ensure that women are aware of their rights and able to enforce them.

Yet, despite these challenges, women and girls in rural areas are far from passive victims of injustice. Many have fought back against structural inequalities and generations of deeply entrenched patriarchy to play an important role in improving livelihoods and wellbeing, as well as sustainably conserving and using resources. Research shows that having 25-30% women's representation in community forestry institutions has a positive impact on forest conditions and regeneration. The participation of women in natural resource decision-making raises awareness of the need for conservation among a wider cross-section of people, including children, demonstrating the transformative possibilities when women fully and equally participate in the decisions and issues that directly affect them, their families and their communities.

The opportunities for transformation similarly open up when women have increased land rights, contributing to improved food and income security for women and their families, which in turn bolsters economic independence and sustainable livelihoods. When women have greater access to the tools and resources they need to feed and support their families, this can have effects for generations to come: reduced infant mortality, greater levels of education and maternal health, and stronger and more resilient communities.

In Pakistan, UN Women collaborated with local partners Baanhn Beli and Gorakh Foundation to support over a thousand women farmers in vulnerable situations to acquire land tenancy rights from their feudal landlords. Land tenure security is a critical asset for landless women. Before becoming tenants with some tenure security, they were unable to make long-term plans and invest in farming, protect themselves from natural disasters or improve their standard of living. In many cases these women were forced to leave their lands during the harvest and, in the absence of formal written agreements, suffered heavy losses and trauma. Training and mentoring allowed these women farmers to prepare tenancy agreements and landholding maps and negotiate with male landlords.

The UN Women – Maasai Women's Development Organization partnership in Tanzania has empowered hundreds of Maasai women to acquire land, find additional employment and diversify their economic activities to supplement their families' incomes. Mama Neema Olenriya, 42, chairperson of the village council, spoke of her 20-year struggle to acquire land: "For generations, only men were allowed to own and inherit land, so they question whether women are fit to be land owners. But I am also Maasai—I can also fight for my rights." Along with other village women, she received training on land and property rights and acquired the confidence and knowledge to demand that village authorities allocate land to women.

Land ownership also remains a key issue for rural women in El Salvador. Over the last four decades, land reforms have tried to reverse historically unequal land distribution, but progress has been slow, and reforms targeted mainly male



heads of households. Women – over 50% of the population – were only 11% of agricultural holders in El Salvador. The *Mujeres en Acción* cooperative is one of 26 rural women’s groups in El Salvador that UN Women supported with IFAD and *Ciudad Mujer*, a government initiative, to bolster women’s entrepreneurship. Since none of the *Mujeres en Acción* members own land, they found a plot and lawyers at *Ciudad Mujer* helped them to secure a free long-term lease. *Mujeres en Acción* grows tomatoes, peppers and eggplants, enough for their own use and to sell. The cooperative hopes to earn enough to secure the future of their families. As cooperative member Mercedes Garcia said, “I will save to support my daughter so she can finish high school and go to the university—something I wasn’t able to do.”

Thus, change is happening, but not nearly fast or comprehensively enough.

It is vital that governments address discriminatory laws that prevent women from enjoying equal and secure access to land ownership and use. Globally, 102 countries have laws or customary practices that deny women’s equal access to land.

In the CSW62 agreed conclusions on the 2018 priority theme of “Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls,” Member States recommended that countries enact legislation and undertake reforms to realize the equal rights of women and men, and where applicable girls and boys, to natural resources, including access to, use of, ownership of and control over land, property and inheritance rights, taking into account diverse types of land tenure and enabling equal access to justice and legal assistance to realize these rights. In addition, countries should promote women’s land registration and land title certification, regardless of their marital status, and address practices and stereotypes that undermine their land rights, including in the context of customary and traditional systems, which often govern land management, administration and transfer in rural areas.

UN Women’s recent joint publication with UN Habitat on women’s land rights, *Pathways for Secure & Equal Land Tenure for Women*, could serve as a valuable tool to support the efforts of development organizations, governments, civil society and academic and research institutions in tackling the barriers to rural women’s realization of equal land rights and full participation in society. It consolidates global research and knowledge and builds a framework for analysis by creating land tenure profiles that are gender-sensitive and take into account women’s multiple and intersecting identities. This can be used to develop robust and innovative land tools that provide responses tailored to women’s and girls’ needs.

There is just over a decade left to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Every country in the world has committed itself to the 2030 Agenda. But we know that achieving its aims and realizing rural women and girls’ human rights requires renewed commitment to the task, and the increased financing that goes hand-in-hand with that commitment.

Just as a successful harvest depends on the favorable outcome of multiple, interdependent factors -- soil quality, seeds, water, weather and tools, so achieving gender equality relies on ensuring that women's rights are equal to those of men in every sphere. The time to stand with rural women and girls and to take action is now. Seeds sown today can bear fruit for generations to come.

# Rural Women of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

They deserve equality and  
will persist in their struggle  
until they achieve it

*Rosa Monteiro\**

## 1

There is an official history – the history that everyone knows. Not long ago, Portugal was mostly a rural country. In 1960, 65% of the national population lived in rural areas.<sup>1</sup> Income was largely drawn from agriculture, livestock and related activities. Many people worked from sunup to sundown for very little pay.

Poverty and sharp economic imbalances help us understand why the following decades saw the hinterlands becoming increasingly depopulated. By 2017, only 35% of the population in Portugal lived in rural areas. The share of individuals employed in the primary sector of the economy, which stood at 27% in 1981, fell to 6% in 2017.<sup>2</sup>

These figures signal wide and profound changes in society, including massive flows of people. The experiences of men forced by economic hardship to leave their hometowns are fortunately well documented. Much less is known about

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1 World Bank data, retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS>

2 Statistics Portugal and Pordata, retrieved from <https://www.pordata.pt>

the women – the women who also left their hometowns and the women who stayed.

Filling in this gap is a task worthy of our greatest efforts. Connecting the dots. One might for instance delve into the writings of Ana de Castro Osório, a feminist author from the early 20th century who used oral accounts from poor peasant women as an inspiration in some of her essays and stories. One might go through a precious book originally published as a serial in 1948-1950 under the title *As Mulheres do Meu País* (The Women of My Country), in which the journalist and political activist Maria Lamas described the working and living conditions of women at the time. These conditions also inspired novelists such as Alves Redol, Soeiro Pereira Gomes or Ferreira de Castro.

Step by step, the lost voices of rural women are raised and a new history takes shape. A history that includes the many girls and women who were separated from all that was familiar to them, and became servants in a distant city. A history that includes the many who ventured into foreign countries, uncertain of whether they might ever come back. A history that includes the women who stayed. Peasants, but not only. They worked in factories too; they sold products in markets and fairs; they were seamstresses; they were teachers.

*It is our collective responsibility to fulfil the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which asserts gender equality as a major goal. Economic growth is key, but so is the empowerment of all women and girls; so is the elimination of violence and harmful practices; so is investment in lifelong education and inclusive scientific and technological development; so is gender parity in decision making at the political, economic and public levels; and a number of other priorities that become immediately apparent when the experiences of men and women are equally taken into consideration. Positive effects on the daily lives of women and men can only be attained if strong emphasis is placed on the territorialisation of public policy.”*

All of these occupations were combined with a disproportionate weight of domestic and family tasks, unequally placed on the women’s shoulders since their early childhood.

But these women did more than work. Let us not forget about their engagement in community and political activities, regardless of the many obstacles they encountered along the way and the frequent belittlement of their role in later accounts. One of the events recorded in our collective memory occurred in the spring of 1846, when several women from Fontarcada, a small town in the northern region of Minho, played a key role in a popular movement that would eventually spread to other parts of the country, in opposition to the national government.

*As sete mulheres do Minho  
Mulheres de grande valor  
Armadas de fuso e roca  
Correram com o regedor*

The seven women from Minho  
Women of great value  
Armed with spindle and distaff  
Drove away the governor

From the song *As sete mulheres do Minho* by José Afonso, 1979

In the spring of 1954, this time in a southern town called Baleizão, a group of fourteen women harvesters joined their voices to demand a pay rise. The leader of this group was shot by the police. Killed at the age of 26, Catarina Eufémia became a symbol of the struggle for the rights of rural workers and the claim for a democratic regime in Portugal.

*Tinha chegado o tempo  
Em que era preciso que alguém não recuasse*

The time had come  
When it was necessary that someone  
didn't back off

*E a terra bebeu um sangue duas vezes puro  
Porque eras a mulher e não somente a fêmea*

And the soil drank a blood twice pure  
Because you were the woman and not  
only the female

*Eras a inocência frontal que não recua*

You were the plainspoken innocence  
that doesn't back off

From the poem "Catarina Eufémia" by Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen, 1972

## 2

The year is now 2018.

Despite notable improvements in access to healthcare and education, with very significant consequences for the lives of people in rural areas, the contemporary reality of these areas in Portugal is still permeated by multiple sources of concern. One of them is an ageing population. The indicators on formal education are also worrisome. More than half of the women in rural areas have completed only primary education or less. A vast majority of agricultural producers do not have any specific training for their work.

Limitations in services that are critical to quality of life, such as those pertaining to childcare and eldercare, are especially detrimental for women as they continue to undertake most of the unpaid work in the family. Some of them still need permission from their husband or their father to engage in work or leisure activities. The pursuit of autonomy and freedom exposes a woman to intense social control and vilification, and it may jeopardise not only the respect of others but also her income, her social support network, even her physical safety.

However, a closer look also shows that some rural women are young, highly qualified, and taking up professional jobs that were once out of reach for them. Some of these women are developing ground breaking projects within cooperatives or microenterprises in agriculture, tourism and other sectors. Many innovative experiences led by women in craftwork have been successful, and boosted local communities and traditions with the support of advanced technological, design and marketing tools.

It is a duty of policy-makers to take the historical background into consideration. They must also respond to problems by enhancing the existing resources and potentials.

It is our collective responsibility to fulfil the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which asserts gender equality as a major goal. Economic growth is key, but so is the empowerment of all women and girls; so is the elimination of violence and harmful practices; so is investment in lifelong education and inclusive scientific and technological development; so is gender parity in decision making at the political, economic and public levels; and a number of other priorities that become immediately apparent when the experiences of men and women are taken equally into consideration.

Positive effects on the daily lives of women and men can only be achieved if strong emphasis is placed on the territorialisation of public policy. But what does it actually mean, to territorialise?

It means bringing local characteristics and needs into the process of policy design from its very outset. It means creating specific tools to ensure and stimulate the fruitfulness of initiatives on the ground. It means investing in networking and partnerships. It means ascribing local authorities and non-governmental organisations a role as strategic agents in the definition and implementation of measures.

This is what we have been busy with.

Fair and vigorous action in the field of equality is only the beginning. We must also push for attention to gender asymmetries in all other fields of governance. Mainstreaming is crucial to ensure integrated, coherent and effective intervention on the ground.

Important developments in this regard have been recently achieved in Portugal. In particular, the gender perspective is now acknowledged in the national programmes for territorial cohesion and for territorial organisation. The same is true for the Programme for Rural Development, which includes financial support, training and technical assistance.

In 2016, more than three million adults participated in lifelong learning activities – about one million more than in 2007 –, with a balanced distribution between

women and men.<sup>3</sup> By the end of 2016, 42% of the projects funded by the Programme for Rural Development in the category of new agricultural workers were led by women.<sup>4</sup>

### 3

There is more than one history. And societies are changing as we speak. Inequalities persist and reshape. But victories are possible.

Today more than ever, we know that women living and working in rural areas are as diverse as can be. In addition to gender, some of them suffer from additional discrimination and violence based on age, racial and ethnic origin, disability, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or sexual characteristics. Instead of reducing women to a monolithic category, policy-makers must pay attention and ensure adequate responses to their specific needs and experiences.

In fact, none of these issues can be entirely detached from the others. The promotion of equality and non-discrimination is a requisite for quality of life and should not be forgotten by any community hoping for an attractive and sustainable future.

Rural women deserve equality. They have long been clamouring for it. And, undoubtedly, they will persist until they get it.

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3 Oliveira, Célio *et al.* (2017), *Educação e Formação de Adultos em Portugal: Retrato Estatístico de uma Década*, Lisboa, Statistics Portugal.

4 Administrative data from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forests and Rural Development, Government of Portugal.





# Empowering Our Female Farmers to End Food Insecurity

We are still in time to take actions to address the key dimensions of food security

*Luis Alberto Moreno\**

According to an old development industry tale, many years ago an inspection team traveled to a rural community to check on an irrigation project. On arriving, they found a group of women wielding shovels and picks and pushing wheelbarrows full of sand and stones. “Where are the men hired to dig canals?” one of the visitors asked. “They’re playing soccer against the neighboring village,” a woman answered. “But why are you doing their jobs?” the perplexed outsider inquired. “Oh, we’re not working. We’re just helping out,” was the unironic reply.

While the anecdote may be apocryphal, there’s more than a kernel of truth to it. Rural women’s economic contributions are systematically underestimated. Take the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, where there are some 58 million women living in rural areas. By official estimates, 17 million of them are economically active, but only 4.5 million are considered agricultural producers. Many experts believe there’s a significant undercount, as farm labor carried out by women are often computed as household work. As hard as women might toil tending to vegetable gardens, raising poultry, or grinding corn, those efforts aren’t typically acknowledged as part of the aggregate rural output.

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Beyond the questions of accuracy and fairness, the failure to properly account for rural women's work points up to underscores another aspect of gender inequality: men have far greater access to land, credit, technology and extension services than women, which explains the productivity gap between men and women in rural areas. In my region, for instance, women receive only 10% of farming loans. But by some estimates, if they were offered the same access to productive resources as their male counterparts, female farmers could boost their production significantly.

Such an increase would go a long way towards narrowing another persistent gap: food insecurity, which happens when part of the population lacks access to enough food to meet their needs and lead healthy and active lives. That this should happen in our region could seem paradoxical, given our prodigious agricultural potential. Even though we were the only region in the world to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of reducing hunger levels to less than half between 1990 and 2015, the number of people facing food insecurity has grown. This apparent contradiction is explained because South America's improvements in food production outstripped the rest of the region, pulling up the overall average. In fact, between 2015 and 2016, the number of people facing hunger has increased by 2.4 million, reaching a total of 42.5 million for our region – roughly the population of Argentina.



*The evidence shows that empowering women bolsters food security. Going forward, rural development programs should reflect those goals. In addition, policymakers should strive to include gender approaches in all development programs in the productive, social protection, and water and sanitation sectors that target rural populations. Finally, to design and implement sound interventions, we will need higher quality data, disaggregated by gender, to measure women's needs and contributions in terms to food security. If we succeed in doing the right thing by our female farmers, we have a chance to eliminate hunger in our region in our lifetime."*

This worrisome trend casts doubts about our chances of achieving the Sustainable Development Goal of eliminating hunger by 2030. Making matters worse, our region is also experiencing a so-called "triple burden" of malnutrition: the simultaneous presence of undernourishment, micronutrient deficiencies, and obesity. These problems cause all kinds of complications, from limiting the cognitive development in infants to increasing the incidence of chronic diseases such as diabetes and cancer, which are rapidly overburdening our healthcare systems.

However, we are still in time to take actions to address the key dimensions of food security: availability, access, utilization and stability. And by placing a strong emphasis on gender

equality and empowering rural women we might achieve more rapidly our goal of reducing food insecurity.

### **Food Availability**

Food availability refers to the supply of food at the local or national levels, which depends on agricultural production or imports. In our region, women play a key role in availability by participating in all stages of food production, packaging and distribution. However, time restrictions can limit their involvement in farming, creating greater gender disparities. Inequality in women's access to labor, land, training and technology further hampers their productivity and efficiency. Logically, narrowing the gender gap in access to productive inputs and resources could boost the availability of food and reduce hunger.

To achieve those goals, we should promote specific actions to foster female farmers' participation in productive programs, including the provision of technical assistance with a gender approach. This implies setting specific targets of female beneficiaries and providing agricultural training that takes into consideration their specific needs in terms of language, accessibility, timing, and periodicity. Land titling projects should be a fundamental line of action. These must be designed and implemented to promote gender equity and equality by: (i) promoting institutions that protect equal access to land by men and women; (ii) providing women with information about their legal rights and responsibilities regarding land ownership; and (iii) promoting joint ownership of land between spouses.

### **Food Access**

Even when there's enough food available at a local or national level, households can face food insecurity if they lack the economic means to obtain food. Poverty and gender income disparities are threats to food access. In our region, female heads of household face greater levels of poverty than their male counterparts. According to international organizations, in rural settings, this is largely explained by the fact that 40% of women over the age of 15 receive no income despite working daily, often in agricultural activities. Naturally, boosting rural women's incomes and narrowing the gender wage gap can help improve food access.

To this end we should consider two main lines of action. First, we need to promote more income-generating productive activities for rural women, for example by expanding their access to credit and training on production and commercialization activities. Second, we should expand economic opportunities for women by increasing female labor participation, narrowing the gender income and wage gaps, as well as promoting access to more productive and higher quality jobs for women in rural areas. For example, we can promote female entrepreneurship in rural areas through training programs that also help reduce gender discrimination.

## **Food Utilization**

Women have historically played an indispensable role in ensuring household nutrition and wellbeing, particularly in rural areas where they are the primary caregivers and are traditionally in charge of the selection, preparation and provision of food. However, women also face greater challenges regarding nutritional outcomes, particularly obesity. In our region, the rate of female obesity stands at 26.8 percent, compared to 18.5 percent for men. This trend is particularly worrisome in the Caribbean, where the rate of female obesity is almost four times higher than the rate for men. Empowering women is key to improving nutritional outcomes. In fact, female empowerment is associated with improvements in household dietary diversity, maternal and child nutrition, as well as other indicators of infant development.

To those ends, we need to design and implement interventions in agriculture, water and sanitation, and social protection with a view to improving nutrition and empowering women. For instance, rural development programs should involve women actively in their implementation, raising their social and economic standing; while social protection programs should establish targets tied to female nutrition and health indicators. In addition, we need to promote projects that induce behavioral changes that lead to healthy diets and reduce overweight and obesity, mainly among women and children, who constitute the most affected populations. Finally, it's crucial to increase access to potable water in rural areas.

## **Food Stability**

Food stability implies that supply isn't threatened by unexpected variations in prices or climate. Measures to ensure a stable food flow are particularly important for the wellbeing of the most vulnerable population groups, which are generally the worst affected by unexpected changes since they lack effective mechanisms to smooth food consumption. This is particularly important in the case of women, who are more likely to reduce their food consumption than other household members when facing unexpected shortages.

This suggests the need to design and implement policy instruments with a gender approach to reduce vulnerability of food systems to climate change and natural disasters. One line of action to tackle this is promoting women's participation in climate-smart agricultural interventions. We also need to improve national agricultural research institutes' capacity to develop and disseminate improved crop varieties typically grown by women, with increased resilience to climate change. Women should also be encouraged to play active roles in water user associations and to take part in decisions regarding irrigation in their communities. Finally, we must design disaster risk management interventions with activities that specifically target women.

In summary, the evidence shows that empowering women bolsters food security. Going forward, rural development programs should reflect those goals. In addition,

policymakers should strive to include gender approaches in all development programs in the productive, social protection, and water and sanitation sectors that target rural populations. Finally, to design and implement sound interventions, we will need higher quality data, disaggregated by gender, to measure women's needs and contributions in terms to food security. If we succeed in doing the right thing by our female farmers, we have a chance to eliminate hunger in our region in our lifetime.

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# Rural Women and their Policies – a Matter of Equality

Rural women in Colombia, as in many countries around the world, have faced structural discrimination, because they are rural dwellers and because they are women. A third type of discrimination has to do with their belonging to an ethnic group, and a fourth the fact that they are victims of the armed conflict

*Marta Lucía Ramírez de Rincón\**

In considering an initial framework for devising public policies that target rural women with a view to transforming their quality of life, we must first of all attempt to define or redefine who rural women are, and then what are the new dynamics or life strategies of these women, who either live in or come from rural areas.

The localized assessment of who they are and what they do can then inform the development of public policy actions that enable us to properly address their practical needs and strategic interests. Assessments, data, and analyses of rural women are valuable tools in highlighting the gaps between rural women in relation to urban women and rural men. Unfortunately, there is still a lack not only of gender disaggregated data, but also of rural/ urban specific data. This affects our ability to monitor progress and to design appropriate public policies. Therefore, it is imperative that we make an effort to reduce statistical discrimination, because data equips us to assist in improving the quality of life of vulnerable populations, such as rural women, in a targeted way, aware as we are that poverty is feminized, and even more so in rural areas.

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Public policies should be based on data, in order to design relevant lines of action that focus on resolving specific problems that rural women in each region face. One of the major challenges for public policy is to ensure the financial independence and empowerment of rural women in areas such as community, political, and cultural participation. Nobre and Hora (2017) explain that access to health, education, welfare and social security, land ownership, and credit, are factors that determine women's ability to consider themselves members of the community and to develop as citizens.

### **Why are public policies for rural women important?**

The answer stems from the fact that gender equality is closely tied to development, as expressed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Economic development is the process by which a nation improves the economic, political, and social conditions of its people. Therefore, development is seen as an improvement in living conditions, by and for men and women, in equal measure.

As regards public policies for rural women, specifically, these will implicitly require us to drive processes to transform and change living conditions in rural society (for men and women). The transformation of this society is dependent on policies that are external to it and on internal plans proposed by local communities, which involve utilizing internal resources and negotiating for external resources to change these living conditions.

*It is important to consider that one of the characteristics common to the lives of rural women throughout Latin America and the Caribbean is that they are overworked, due to a sexual division of labour that shoulders them with the responsibility of caring for children, the elderly and the sick, while the work that they do in the reproductive and production spheres, as well as for the consumption of their families, is disregarded. The production work that rural women do is considered as helping in the home, rather than as work in and of itself."*

It is only through public policy that we will be able to design a plan of action to coordinate the efforts of all sectors tasked with strengthening rural areas, while incorporating a gender focus, and therefore promoting women. If efforts are not explicitly targeted toward benefitting rural women, we will never achieve equality, because we know that market forces by themselves will never create equality between men and women in the rural sector.

Given the factors that will be required to transform rural society, planning for development should not be strictly a technical process, but also a political process, in



which the conflict of interests between men and women features in negotiations, and spurs structural social transformation, rather than one-off and temporary solutions to the practical needs of men or women.

Equality improves the quality of life of men as much as it does of women. Seeing themselves as equals reduces social pressures on men to be the providers for the family, as well as the levels of violence that are encouraged in them from childhood, allowing them to enjoy family life completely. Equality also allows women to develop in various occupations; to empower themselves financially; to have the power to negotiate within the home and to take decisions that benefit the family, such as improvements in education and nutrition; as well as to have more egalitarian and less violent relationships.

### **Who are rural women?**

First of all, it must be said that the definition of who rural women are is still a subject of discussion and an ongoing construct, with a wide range of suggestions being offered, all very valid. However, to further enrich the analysis, in a bid to precisely determine the sphere of action for public policy, I would like to offer some considerations that will narrow down the scope of policy strategies for this population group.

A first attempt should be made, recognizing that this is a broad-based group, with similarities and differences. This diversity can be seen in the range of activities in which they are involved, as well as the territorial and cultural inter-relationships that define them.

### **What do we know about their activities?**

As far as their activities are concerned, most definitions identify them as rural women, based on the premise that their production activity is directly related to the rural milieu, even if this activity is not recognized by the State's information and measurement systems, or even if it is unpaid.

With this in mind, the term would apply to women who are farmers, reapers, fisherfolk, housewives, salaried employees in rural agribusinesses, even non-agricultural workers in agroindustry and micro-enterprises, as well as in other activities performed in the context of a much broader perspective of rurality, such as activities related to the integration of agro-production and trade chains in all types of organizations, rural tourism and ecology, the craft industry, the crafting of metals and precious stones, and other new avenues of opportunity, including marketing activities, transformation of products, and the provision of services that support these activities. (Congress of the Republic of Colombia, 2002.)

On the other hand, it is important to consider that one of the characteristics common to the lives of rural women throughout Latin America and the Caribbean

is that they are overworked, due to a sexual division of labour that shoulders them with the responsibility of caring for children, the elderly and the sick, while the work that they do in the reproductive and production spheres, as well as for the consumption of their families, is disregarded.

The production work that rural women do is considered as helping in the home, rather than as work in and of itself. The challenge is to make the work that women are already doing visible, as well as the knowledge associated with it, and to increase their ability to choose what they do, how they do it, and how the rewards are used.

### **Where are they located?**

With respect to territorial interrelationships, a longitudinal perspective is necessary, spanning the life cycle of these women and successive generations. There are times when they migrate to the city, or even to other countries, but do not sever their connection to the countryside. For example, they may invest money in the production unit where they hope to return, whenever possible. Moreover, generation after generation, there are young daughters or granddaughters of farmers who return or wish to return to the countryside.

Additionally, the new dynamics arising from how communities are made up, compel us to take a look at the increasingly closer relationship between, and the interdependence of, the rural and urban, specifically the linkages that are established as a result of the location where people live, and the place and purpose of their work.

The composition of rural territories and urban agricultural practices are concrete examples of this dynamic. Rural territories are spaces adjacent to cities with agricultural activities that are industrial in nature and tertiary activities, such as accommodation, rest, and recreation services. These areas feature neighbourhoods or condominiums with people originally from the city, who have extensive purchasing power and place a high value on rural environmental conditions, and they also offer all the public services that are available in a city.

On the other hand, urban agriculture is a practice that arises when people from rural areas migrate to the city, for different reasons, bringing their knowledge of agricultural practices to these large cities. Currently, this is a widespread practice among the population, given the need to produce healthy food, to improve food security, and to satisfy personal needs. This method of production characteristically takes place in reduced spaces and also employs re-used and recycled material, available in homes. (Jardín Botánico de Medellín, 2013).

It must be mentioned that these new territorial arrangements and production practices, which involve an extensive number of women, often take place outside of public policy guidelines. However, they influence cultural processes, such as the preservation of rural culture in the cities and the transfer of urban lifestyles to the countryside.

## **What affects them?**

From the perspective of social interaction, rural women in Colombia—an example that can be extrapolated to many countries—have historically experienced structural discrimination, given that they are rural dwellers and are also women. In some instances, a third type of discrimination comes into play, if they are members of a particular ethnic group, as does a fourth, when they are victims of armed conflict. Thus, it may be possible for them to experience four types of discrimination simultaneously. (UNDP, 2011, p. 15).

The first type of discrimination is related to their status as rural residents, a situation which affects rural men and women equally. There is a wide gulf between inhabitants from rural and urban areas, in terms of access to goods and social services, such as health, education, drinking water and basic sanitary conveniences, electricity, road infrastructure, recreation areas, caregiving services, availability of technological tools, the justice system, inter alia.

The fact that they are women makes them subject to another type of discrimination. Historically, the cultural and socioeconomic treatment that has been meted out to them has placed them at a disadvantage in comparison to men. Consequently, they experience greater levels of poverty, limited opportunities for participation, much lower wages, fewer opportunities to enter the labor market and educational system, barriers to accessing justice, limited opportunities to participate in programs for adjudication and formalization of land ownership. In general, they continue to experience conditions that limit their independence and their ability to develop as citizens. The gender gap is even more pronounced in rural than in urban areas.

A third scenario involves discrimination based on ethnicity and race, which are factors that determine living conditions, opportunities and the social acceptance of women of African descent, indigenous women, and women from the Rrom community in political, economic, and cultural spheres.

Finally, certain violent situations, such as forced displacement, sexual violence, and forced recruitment have a differentiated and disproportionate impact on rural women.

## **Let us not forget young people**

According to FAO (2017), there is a high incidence of migration to urban areas among young people between 15 and 29 years of age, particularly women between 15 and 19. The amount of formal education and exposure to information technologies has increased for those young people remaining in the countryside, which may help to improve their outlook on life.

The FAO (2017) indicated that in Latin America and the Caribbean 51.3% of young women and 29.9% of young men who work in agriculture are unpaid. Young salaried

employees doing the same jobs as older employees receive lower salaries, work longer hours and endure harder working conditions. Young women tend to work more hours overall, but fewer hours for which they are paid. Their responsibilities in the home prevent many of them from studying or working, since domestic work is not considered to be an economic activity in official statistics (Nobre & Hora, 2017).

Having no income of their own causes many young women to be heavily dependent on a parent or partner, which in many instances leads to situations of control and abuse of power, in which they become the victims of violence.

A study on rural youth and decent employment in Latin America (FAO, 2016) states that, “Young people who work in the household are one of the most vulnerable groups among the poor, since they are not paid employees, they do not study, their contribution to the home is not recognized, and they have limited opportunities for personal growth or for participation in social organizations or leisure activities”. This condition also limits their ability to acquire production factors, such as land, labor, and working capital. Thus, their participation in production activities is low, which is a motivating factor in their abandonment of the countryside.

### **Now we can formulate policies**

In order to have access to information on the variables described above, in an attempt to define rural women in reference to what they do, where they are located, what affects them, and the conditions peculiar to young rural women, governments must make a greater investment to fill in the gaps in data and to monitor advances in the implementation of policy actions.

Data collection is a major challenge when we are attempting to measure social norms that discriminate against rural women, mostly due to the widespread belief that social norms are not quantifiable. A valuable tool that our States should use is the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) of the OECD that shows that formal and informal laws, and norms and social practices that restrict the access of women and girls to resources and opportunities for empowerment, which are termed as discriminatory social institutions, exacerbate gender disparities in the agriculture sector (Ramos, 2018).

Measuring laws (formal and informal), attitudes, norms and discriminatory practices in all regions of the country, not only highlights the effects of discrimination and gender inequality, poverty, and the marginalization of women, but also demonstrates how discrimination against them interacts with a series of factors, such as rural/urban differences or levels of education.

Consequently, it would be advisable to use the information that has been collected to create a national-regional balance of the number of institutions geared towards rural women, the institutional capacity to offer these services and to implement new programs or expand existing ones.

In order to align the available institutional infrastructure with the realities of rural women, it is imperative that we promote greater participation of rural women's organizations in monitoring, modifying, and formulating rural development programs that target women.

Finally, proposing that equal opportunities for rural women be one of the criteria that the central government uses to determine the level of resources allocated to local governments, and that a percentage of investments be earmarked for social infrastructure, would ensure a high level of implementation of public policies for rural women.

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# Rural Women – Making the Invisible, Visible

Women in rural communities  
still remain one of the most  
marginalised groups

*Gabriela Ramos\**

Achieving gender equality has never been higher on the political agenda. The focus in international fora is often on achieving equal pay, equal access to opportunities in the labour market, or equal representation in parliaments, on boards and in government. Much of this vital work implies a focus on women in urban contexts. But often too little attention is paid to women in rural communities **who still remain one of the most marginalised groups in society.**

Rural women face many constraints that limit their social and economic opportunities: lack of land rights, infrastructure and basic services, restricted access to decent work and social protection as well as exclusion from decision-making processes and leadership positions.

And yet empowering these women is critical for rural development, sustainable agriculture, food security and improved nutrition. Indeed, people's access to food relies largely on the dual work of rural women as producers and caregivers. Women represent on average 43% of the agricultural labour force – for example, growing crops,

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livestock and fish farming – and 65% of the unpaid family workers in developing countries<sup>1</sup>.

In 2018, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women recognized the importance of securing women’s land rights, guaranteeing equal economic opportunities and empowering rural women to achieve the 2030 Agenda.<sup>4</sup> Providing women with equal access to productive resources could increase the production on female farms by 20% to 30% in developing countries. But in order to ensure rural women are not overlooked or left behind, it is imperative to understand the various facets of the problem.

## The problem

Rural women continue to bear the brunt of poor access to childcare services, training, transportation, medical and cultural services, and face a severe lack of job opportunities. Distance from healthcare facilities, services and information as well as from qualified health professionals represents a major obstacle for rural women and girls. In the least developed countries, a rural woman is 38% less likely than an urban woman to give birth with the assistance of a skilled health professional.<sup>5</sup>

Rural women also tend to have lower access to means of production (including land, water, seeds), agricultural inputs, as well as having poor access to social protections systems. Women are also less likely to own land: cultural and legal barriers mean that only 20% of landowners are women. In Latin America and the Caribbean, for example, women account for less than a

*Rural women are particularly vulnerable to gender-based discrimination in social norms, both in OECD and non-OECD countries. Indeed, rural populations are less likely than their urban counterparts to be aware of women’s rights and entitlements.<sup>2</sup> Research has found that in rural settings, men and women are more likely to follow customary laws and practices, which are often more discriminatory than statutory legal frameworks. Disappointingly, the laws or customary practices of 102 countries – over half the countries in the world – still deny women the same rights to access land as men.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, anti-discriminatory legal frameworks have proven insufficient to fully protect women’s rights to resources and assets due to discriminatory opinions and practices.”*

1 FAO (2011), *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010–11 Women in Agriculture: Closing the Gender Gap for Development*, Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome, available at <http://www.fao.org/publications/sofa/2010-11/en/>

2 OECD (2018), *OECD Rural Policy Reviews: Poland 2018*, OECD Publishing, Paris

3 OECD, 2014

4 ECOSOC (2018), *Commission on the Status of Women sixty-second session*, E/CN.6/2018/L.8, available at: <http://undocs.org/en/E/CN.6/2018/L.8>

5 *Ibid.*



third of agricultural holders, ranging from 8% in Guatemala and Belize to 30% in Jamaica and 31% in Peru.<sup>6</sup>

Education is another factor, and while significant progress has been made, girls in rural areas are twice as likely as urban girls to be out of school, and only 39% of rural girls attend secondary school, compared to 45% of rural boys and 59% of girls living in urban areas.<sup>7</sup> Rural girls also lag behind rural boys in levels of educational attainment.

Rural women have less autonomy, voice, agency and decision-making power in households, and are less likely than men to be elected as representatives in most rural councils.<sup>8</sup> In Nicaragua for example, there are few occurrences of women as *wihta* or *síndico* – the key positions holding power over communal land.<sup>9</sup>

### **The social, cultural and legal barriers**

The OECD's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)<sup>10</sup> shows that the formal and informal laws, social norms and practices that restrict women and girls' access to empowerment opportunities and resources – defined as discriminatory social institutions<sup>11</sup> – exacerbate gender disparities in the agricultural sector.<sup>12</sup>

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6 OECD Development Centre (2017), *Latin America and the Caribbean SIGI Regional Report*, OECD, Paris, [http://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/Brochure\\_SIGI\\_LAC\\_web.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/Brochure_SIGI_LAC_web.pdf); FAO, 2011

7 United Nations (2010), *Millennium Development Goals Report*. p. 18. New York, available at: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDG%20Report%202010%20En%20r15%20-low%20res%2020100615%20-.pdf>

8 UNDP (2010), *Women's Representation in Local Government in Asia-Pacific Status Report 2010. Going beyond National Targets in Monitoring Status for MDG 3 on Women's Political Empowerment*, available at: [http://www.capwip.org/readingroom/TopoftheShelf.Newsfeeds/2010/Women's%20Participation%20in%20Local%20Government-Asia%20Pacific%20\(2010\).pdf](http://www.capwip.org/readingroom/TopoftheShelf.Newsfeeds/2010/Women's%20Participation%20in%20Local%20Government-Asia%20Pacific%20(2010).pdf)

9 CIFOR (2012), *Gender and forests in Nicaragua's indigenous territories: From national policy to local practice*, [http://webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/ebook/serien/yo/CIFOR\\_WP/WP95.pdf](http://webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/ebook/serien/yo/CIFOR_WP/WP95.pdf)

10 The OECD SIGI is a cross-country measure of gender-based discrimination in social institutions.

11 OECD Development Centre (2014), *Social Institutions and Gender Index 2014 Synthesis Report*, OECD, Paris, available at: <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/docs/BrochureSIGI2015.pdf>

12 Jütting, J. & Morrisson, C. (2009). *Women, bad jobs, rural areas: what can "SIGI" tell us?* OECD Development Centre, Paris.

13 OECD (2018), *OECD Rural Policy Reviews: Poland 2018*, OECD Publishing, Paris

14 OECD, 2014

Discriminatory social norms dictated at the household level designate women as primary carers, leaving them with an unequal division of labour and a greater share of unpaid care work. This forces women to juggle their household responsibilities with work in the field, often to the detriment of their productivity.<sup>15</sup> Rural women therefore tend to spend more time in reproductive and household chores than urban women; including time spent fetching water and fuel – due to a lack of basic infrastructure and public services.

On account of gendered social norms that view unpaid care work as a female prerogative, women across different regions, socio-economic classes and cultures spend on average between three and six hours on unpaid care activities, while men spend between half an hour and two hours.<sup>16</sup> Latin American and Caribbean rural women dedicate an additional ten hours in care work and household responsibilities compared to urban women, and three times more than rural men. This also makes women less mobile, and more reliant on their immediate surroundings, which can make them particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change on agriculture, and similarly, rural women are often the first to “absorb shocks” from food crises.

### **Making the invisible, visible: solutions**

The OECD is working across multiple fronts to address these inequalities and empower rural woman. This effort is structured around four pillars.

**First, undertaking legal reforms and gender-sensitive policies** are necessary to protect rural women’s rights and promote gender equality, as called for by SDG Indicator 5.1.1.<sup>17</sup> In particular, harmonising customary laws with national laws in line with international human rights commitments would significantly improve women’s land rights. Even where these land rights are legally guaranteed, discriminatory customs and practices restrict their ability to own, control, inherit, manage and make decisions over land. Legal reforms must be accompanied by long-term interventions such as awareness-raising campaigns and community dialogues to ensure full acceptance of harmonisation between customary law and statutory law. This should then be accompanied by legal literacy programmes to help women, families and communities understand their legal rights to property. Effective legal tools to protect women’s land rights include joint titling, providing equal inheritance rights, recognising female heads of household, and improving women’s ability to access technology and other agricultural inputs.

In terms of gender-sensitive policies, it is important to ensure that women can access basic services, particularly education and health services by improving provisions and providing better infrastructure and connectivity. Indeed, all policies

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15 World Bank, 2017

16 Ferrant G., et al. (2014), *Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes*, available at: [https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/Unpaid\\_care\\_work.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/Unpaid_care_work.pdf)

17 SDG 5.1.1: Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex.

should be viewed through a gender lens; the OECD advocates gender budgeting as an effective way for governments and local authorities to promote equality through the budget process. Planning budgets with women's empowerment in mind can help policy-makers address a range of gender inequalities that have become embedded in public policies and the allocation of resources.

**Second, it is essential to challenge discriminatory social norms and practices.**

On the one hand, this means ensuring the implementation of legal reforms that promote rural women's rights and reduce ongoing discrimination. This involves developing and carrying out programmes to address women's unpaid care work in line with SDG 5.4 through the provision of infrastructure, public services, social protection programmes and campaigns to support the equal redistribution of responsibilities within the household. On the other hand, it is important to dispel stereotypes and "traditional" views of women that prevent a more equal division of household tasks, or prevent women from entering the formal labour market, or girls from continuing education. Gendered stereotypes can be tackled through education, for example by reviewing textbooks to ensure they are gender neutral, or through the promotion of role models that rural girls can relate to. In Mexico, the OECD has worked with the Secretaría de Educación Pública to establish *NiñaSTEM Pueden*<sup>18</sup>, an initiative to encourage school girls to take STEM subjects, by introducing them to Mexican female role models that have been successful in STEM fields.

**Third, the participation of rural women in the labour market must be improved.**

This is key for the sustainability of many rural communities across OECD countries. Around 6% of the OECD population live in remote rural regions, compared to 20% in rural areas close to cities. The demographic constraints in remote rural regions are significant, as areas are faced with the dual challenge of ageing and demographic decline. These population trends will not be reversed, unless women are better integrated into their labour markets, which could involve agricultural, but also non-agricultural sectors. Effective policies include targeted programmes for women entrepreneurship or the establishment of cooperatives, which tend to employ unemployed women. Having more family friendly policies, education and family planning is also crucial, as are investments in health services, infrastructure and secondary education.

**Last but not least, greater investments are needed to bridge data gaps and to enable the monitoring of progress.**

There is a large data challenge when it comes to measuring social norms that are discriminatory to rural women, mostly because of a widely held perception that social norms are unquantifiable. However, the OECD SIGI has shown that social norms can be measured, and that tracking progress on efforts to tackle the drivers of inequality is feasible across all regions, irrespective of levels of development. The SIGI can help measure the underlying drivers of gender inequality, and SIGI country studies provide policymakers and development practitioners with key data on discriminatory social institutions across countries. Measuring discriminatory laws (formal and informal), attitudes,

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<sup>18</sup> [http://ninastem.aprende.sep.gob.mx/en/demo/home\\_](http://ninastem.aprende.sep.gob.mx/en/demo/home_)

norms and practices across different regions of a given country highlights the effects of discrimination on gender inequalities, poverty and the marginalisation of women; it also shows how discrimination against women interacts with a variety of factors, such as rural/urban differences or education levels.

But there is also the more fundamental challenge that data collection across countries is too patchy to be meaningful for a global average. Most of the data provide national averages, which hide rural-urban disparities among women. Countries should have gender-disaggregated statistics across all areas. Incorporating gender dimensions into socio-economic surveys and carrying out better-dedicated surveys are fundamental to tracking change and designing appropriate policies for rural women, female farmers and producers.

Rural women are the powerhouses of rural communities; they keep households running while playing a pivotal role in the rural labour force. Yet, they have been invisible for too long, and their needs are often overlooked or ignored. We must design, develop and deliver the gender inclusive policies necessary to empower women with skills, quality jobs, childcare, good health and greater well-being. Further, as rural women are often at the bottom of the income distribution, supporting their advancement would also support the lives of families that have been left behind. In this way, it is women who will be the agents, not only of their own destinies, but of more inclusive, sustainable and dynamic rural societies.

# Imagine the Future: Rural Women In Latin America and the Caribbean

Innovative technology should be combined with full inclusion for women and girls, which requires digital and financial inclusion

*Katie Taylor\**

We are at a tipping point for our region's future: technology is accelerating and converging, blasting through traditional paradigms and operational models. Placing women and girls at the core of that transformation offers tremendous opportunities for the future of rural development.

**Flash Forward to 2030, to a possible future.** *Amoxтли Santos<sup>1</sup> is a bio-entrepreneur and mother of three. As the morning sun slowly fills the room with a warm orange glow, Amoxтли checks her phone. It's 7:00 a.m. and the power levels from the community's wind and solar park are steady; the drip irrigation system is on schedule for the avocados and peppers; and the sensors track the free-range chickens' preening. Everything is under control. Amoxтли wakes the children, prepares breakfast, and they walk together to the village school. On the way, she snaps a selfie in front of her fresh crops and uploads it to her site. Sales of her salsas and sauces are taking off, and customers can scan their barcodes on their phones and see the farm in real time. Amoxтли has become the face of her brand, marketing its wholesomeness and eco-friendly approach.*

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Development  
Foundation (PADF)

*After greeting teachers, she and several parents sit in on a virtual eco-tourism class, as the community is seeking to capitalize on its ancestral culture and countryside. Amoxtli is hoping to open a bed-and-breakfast<sup>2</sup>, and her neighbors want to expand their restaurant with culinary innovation using native ingredients.*

What would it take to make this future a reality for the 18 million girls in our region currently under the age of 14? How can we empower the almost 60 million women who live in rural areas? By doing two things: 1) driving rural community development through innovation in agriculture and eco-tourism, and 2) radical inclusion of women as leaders and decision-makers in their own destinies.

56% of the region's almost two million out-of-school children are girls<sup>3</sup>. Working women in the region earn from 49 to 68 cents for every dollar a man makes.<sup>4</sup> As the region continues to urbanize, depopulation of rural areas has become associated with many negatives—lack of education, jobs, and opportunities. But rapidly-evolving technology can improve the living and working conditions of rural communities<sup>5</sup>. Cell phones, the internet, radio broadcasting, sensor networks, and stocking and analysis of data can support climate-smart, rural businesses. Technology can increase access to market prices and banking services, sharing of good practices, and control and monitoring of crops.

For the last 10,000 years, the region has evolved rich cultural traditions and deep ancestral knowledge. For most of that time, civilization was rural and fundamentally agricultural. Food and agricultural systems are now changing rapidly and modern agricultural value chains usually offer better pay and entrepreneurship opportunities than traditional agriculture<sup>6</sup> (“soil to supper”).

Governments in our region need to work with the private sector to identify key constraints to agriculture value chain development, adopt workable policies and regulations, and reform the relevant institutions to address these limits. For women to take advantage of these opportunities, they must be able to access relevant inputs and services, markets, information about prices and standards, and have the same freedoms and decision-making power as male market intermediaries.

There are five key indicators<sup>7</sup> of how to spur rural community development through technology and innovation: broadband service, training

*Women play a fundamental role in agricultural and rural production, yet they face a yawning digital gap, which exacerbates access to financing, information, and resources. Radical inclusion of women and girls must address those gaps, practically and quickly, if we are to stir dramatic growth in rural development in the next ten years.”*

workers in digital skills, including everyone in the community, support for innovation, and marketing the community to the rest of the world. Global consumers are becoming more conscious of how and where they source their food and how they travel. Communities that invest in connecting to the world can gain access to information and resources and market their advantages more compellingly—natural beauty, respect for tradition and culture, and greater awareness of the value of community.

In recent decades, tourism has represented one of the most dynamic industries at the global level.<sup>8</sup> Much of the growth of rural tourism is based on “older ways of life and cultures that respond to the post-modern tourists’ quest for authenticity,”<sup>9</sup> and women play a key role in preserving and transmitting such culture and traditions. The seasonal rhythms of agriculture and rural life, embedded in environmentally friendly practices, can be promoted for added value.

Governments play a vital role in identifying and promoting investment in rural communities. They can support and fund the development of digital infrastructure, distance learning, and STEM<sup>10</sup> education. They can promote public-private partnerships to create virtual clusters of excellence, incentivize job creation, or help match entrepreneurs with investors, in person or virtually.

Yet innovative technology is only one part of the equation. It must be matched by radical inclusion of women and girls, which requires digital and financial inclusion as well as equal access to information and resources.

Studies have showed that women that earn money are more inclined than men to spend it into food for their families or children’s education. As such, they are the engine of sustainable community development. Women are responsible for between 60 and 80 percent of food production in developing countries and additional access (e.g., to land tenure and financing) could increase agricultural production and food security.<sup>11</sup> Evidence shows that women’s land rights reduce domestic violence and enable women to better exit violent relationships. Rural women today face many barriers to achieving their full potential. Engaging them proactively could offer tremendous economic and social returns.<sup>12</sup>

Women play a fundamental role in agricultural and rural production, yet they face a yawning digital gap, which exacerbates access to financing, information, and resources. Radical inclusion of women and girls must address those gaps, practically and quickly, if we are to stir dramatic growth in rural development in the next ten years.

The digital gap can be significant. In Brazil, the mobile ownership gender gap is 15% in rural areas and widens dramatically to 32% in rural areas for mobile internet usage. In Guatemala, the gaps are 8% and 13% respectively.<sup>13</sup>

Technology can help advance women’s financial inclusion: lower transaction costs, access to capital, increased safety and convenience of savings, and less need to travel long distances.<sup>14</sup> Farmers in Malawi who were offered digital

direct deposits for cash crops saw a 21 percent increase in the value of their crop outputs<sup>15</sup>. Enhancing access to digital payments provides women with safe tools for greater control over family finances, reduces the need for intermediaries, and improves economic opportunities.<sup>16</sup>

Yet Latin America still lags in mobile money. Out of the 480 million adults in Latin America, only 15 million are registered mobile money users (only a 3% market penetration).<sup>17</sup> Remittances play a key role for the income of many countries in the region yet barriers such as outdated payment systems, lack of interoperability and the regulatory framework increase cost and withhold usage of new mobile remittances platforms.<sup>18</sup> Governments play a pivotal role in enabling policy and funding solutions that can drive growth, equity, and poverty reduction.<sup>19</sup>

The BBVA Foundations offers interesting insights. Over one million female clients have assets, sales, and credit 20-30% lower than those of men, yet grow more rapidly and represent 80% of the BBVA entrepreneurs who have exited poverty since 2015. These women are the best evidence that they only need an opportunity in order to prosper.<sup>20</sup>

What other obstacles are impeding the inclusion of women and girls? One is the lack of the correct government identification systems that are initially needed to set up a bank account; biometrics and blockchain (among other technologies) can offer a simple, secure and convenient authentication solution to bridge the gap to financial inclusion. For instance, fingerprint authentication or iris scans could link a person directly to their bank card without the need for traditional government identification. The World Food Program (WFP) has been especially innovative in using new technology to link aid to clients through biometric and other innovations.<sup>21</sup>

Women and girls can and must play a vital role in taking advantage of our region's potential. Let us dream, and work to give them the technology, access, and resources they need. Let us bring excitement back to rural areas and agriculture. Let us build on the potential for eco-tourism and innovation. Let us boldly advocate a gender transformative approach, where women and girls will BE the future.

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1 A fictional name and character. Any resemblance to persons real or imagined is coincidence.  
1 "The Farmer of 2030 – Big Changes are on the Way" (<https://oldmooresalmanac.com/the-farmer-of-2030/>)  
3 UNESCO, Latin America and the Caribbean Regional Overview (<https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/laamcari.pdf>)  
4 Baker McKenzie, Spotlight on the gender pay gap in Latin America (<https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/laamcari.pdf>)  
5 Technology can help the region capitalize on its potential as a breadbasket for the world and as an engine for eco-friendly tourism.  
6 Mame Khary, "How to reserve the interest of youth and women in migration or rural exodus toward agriculture and rural entrepreneurship?", UN Women, Expert Group Meeting, (<https://www.ngocsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/How-to-reverse-the-interest-of-youth-and-women-in-migration-or-rural-exodus-toward-agriculture-and-rural-entrepreneurship.pdf>)



- 7 Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities (MIRC) project, Robert Bell, co-founder of the Intelligent Community Forum (ICF), compiled key data on the five key indicators that the ICF knows are crucial to success. Bell's analysis showed the 11 test communities made substantial progress, on average scores improved by 9.49%. Final report of the Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities Program ([https://www.intelligentcommunity.org/mirc\\_report](https://www.intelligentcommunity.org/mirc_report))
- 8 As cited in Bogdan- Constantin Ibănescu\*, Oana Mihaela Stoleriu, Alina Munteanu and Corneliu Iatu, "The Impact of Tourism on Sustainable Development of Rural Areas: Evidence from Romania", Mutidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, 2018.
- 9 As Cited in Bogdan- Constantin Ibănescu\*, Oana Mihaela Stoleriu, Alina Munteanu and Corneliu Iatu. Op. Cit
- 10 Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)
- 11 Yet they rarely own the land they are working on, have tenure security or control over the land. "Quick Guide to What and How: increasing women's access to land", Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).
- 12 Closing the economic gender gap, particularly in access to resources and adequate compensation, has the potential to lead to an increase in productivity, reduction of poverty and the promotion of national economic growth through increased yields by 20–30%. Sinan Hatil, Anne Marie Moran and Grace Alexander, "Financial Inclusion Through Mobile Technology: Closing the Agricultural Gender Gap, January 2019, International Institute for Sustainable Development, (<https://sdg.iisd.org/commentary/generation-2030/financial-inclusion-through-mobile-technology-closing-the-agricultural-gender-gap/>).
- 13 The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2018, GSMA Intelligence ([https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/GSMA\\_The\\_Mobile\\_Gender\\_Gap\\_Report\\_2018\\_32pp\\_WEBv7.pdf](https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/GSMA_The_Mobile_Gender_Gap_Report_2018_32pp_WEBv7.pdf)).
- 14 Millions of unbanked women around the world receive wages or payments for the sales of agricultural goods in cash and pay school fees and utilities in cash. Dianna Fletschner and Lisa Kenny, "Rural women's access to financial services: Credit, savings and insurance", ESA Working Paper No. 11-07, March 2011, The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, p. 12. (<http://www.fao.org/3/a-am312e.pdf>).
- 15 "The Benefits of Digital Payments", Better Than Cash Alliance (<https://www.betterthancash.org/why-digital-payments>)
- 16 Globally, 80 million unbanked women receive government wages or transfers in cash; 210 million unbanked women receive cash payments for the sale of agricultural goods; 585 million women pay for utilities in cash; and 225 million women pay school fees in cash. In Bolivia, Peru, and the Philippines, women who received "goal-specific" savings reminders for school fees and housing via text messages increased savings by 16 percent. "The Benefits of Digital Payments", Op. Cit.
- 17 "Mobile Money in Latin America is a Hidden Goldmine", Medici, February 2016. (<https://gomedici.com/mobile-money-in-latin-america-is-a-hidden-goldmine/>)
- 18 Sonia Plaza, "Remittances Market in Latin America: Will Mobile money facilitate financial inclusion?", The World Bank, April 2016, (<http://blogs.worldbank.org/peoplemove/remittances-market-latin-america-will-mobile-money-facilitate-financial-inclusion>).
- 19 Research in Uganda shows women's use of mobile phones is also increasing within farm households, resulting in positive outcomes for productivity and equity. A study on the impacts of M-PESA in Kenya on poverty and gender reveals that by providing a safe and accessible platform to manage transactions and accounts, it has lifted a significant 2% of the total Kenyan households out of poverty (SDG 1.1 and 1.2) and increased women's financial resilience and savings by facilitating access to banking systems. Sinan Hatil, Anne Marie Moran and Grace Alexander, Op. Cit.
- 20 37% of women in the BBVA programs overcame the poverty line in their second year "FMBBVA ayuda a empoderar a las mujeres rurales de América Latina", (<https://www.compromisorse.com/rse/2018/03/19/fmbbva-ayuda-a-empoderar-a-las-mujeres-rurales-de-america-latina/>)
- 21 SCOPE. WFP's Beneficiary and Management System (<http://stisolutions4sdgs.globalinnovationexchange.org/innovations/scope-wfps-beneficiary-and-management-system>)



# 2

## Figures that Loudly Portray Reality

**Meeting of the Landless Workers'  
Movement (MST) prior to occupying land**

Paraná, Brazil

1996

©Sebastião Salgado





# Poverty and Productive Involvement of Rural Women

Women smallholder farmers require incentives to become leaders in land concentration processes

*Josette Altmann Borbón\**

*Ana Isabel García Quesada\*\**

There is broad consensus in our region of the critical role that women play in the development of rural territories in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). In addition to participating in production processes, they guarantee the stability and survival of their families. In fact, it is estimated that close to half of the food that rural families consume is directly produced by women. As we acknowledge rural women's leading role, the diversity that characterizes their universe becomes increasingly evident; it is "manifested by their way of life, with women of all generations who live in the countryside, forests, jungles and areas close to bodies of water; and by their social organization, with peasants, indigenous women, and women of African descent. This diversity is also manifested in the activities that women carry out: they are farmers, collectors, fisherwomen or salaried workers, and they also carry out non-agricultural activities in rural areas" (Nobre *et al.* /FAO, 2017). In addition to these differential factors, it is worth mentioning that, over the past few decades, women have become professionally involved in highly productive entities related to agricultural development, as well as in decision-making bodies, although their presence in the latter field is still low.

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However, despite this diversity and the evidence of changes that have taken place since the last century, obstacles of varying magnitudes still persist, keeping rural Latin American women from fully reaping the benefits of agricultural and rural development. Certainly, a large number of rural women live in poverty, especially when they are involved in the agriculture sector. Given this premise, this article will describe the relationship between rural women's poverty level and their productive insertion.

### **Progress and stagnation in the sociodemographic context**

The rural population in Latin America and the Caribbean continues to decrease, though at a slower pace than in recent decades. Today, 20% of the total population lives in rural areas, representing about 120 million people, nearly half of whom, or 58 million, are women. It is worth noting that the proportion of rural populations varies considerably from one country to another based on their specific conditions.

The universe of rural women has experienced varying degrees of sociodemographic changes. The increase in the number of female-headed rural households is one of the most significant changes; at the regional level, this increase is remarkable given the number of homes. This situation can be attributed to a number of factors, including changes in the agriculture sector (Srinivasan, S.; Rodríguez, A.; ECLAC, 2016). Another significant change is the decrease in the rural fertility rate, which, in turn, has led to a progressive reduction in the size of rural homes

(PAHO, 2017). The considerable upswing in the educational level of rural women under the age of 35, which has now reached or surpassed that of their male counterparts, is also noteworthy. The number of rural women involved in non-agricultural rural employment (NARE) has also increased, boosting rural women's productive diversity.

Other smaller changes that have taken place include a decrease in the levels of extreme poverty among rural women, due to the fact that they are the primary beneficiaries of conditional cash transfer programs. A relative increase in women's participation in agricultural production compared to that of men has also taken place, due to the fact that men's presence

*Public authorities, international cooperation agencies, and other socioeconomic stakeholders must offer incentives to women smallholder farmers to enable them to lead land concentration processes through the creation of productive associations, cooperatives, etc. On this basis, policies should aim to provide women with access to other assets such as credit, technical training, market access, etc., generating a positive impact that will substantially increase the possibility of overcoming poverty for most rural women involved in agricultural production."*



in this sector has decreased. The number of indigenous women and women of African descent who form part of the community of rural women has also increased slightly.

Conversely, other social aspects have experienced few changes, with many issues still persisting. The overall work that rural women carry out is still considerable; in addition to doing productive work, women also look after their families and communities. In agricultural employment in particular, the line that separates the two types of work tends to be blurred in the case of women. Similarly, rural women still face major disparities in terms of their access to public services and social protection. Only slight progress has been achieved with respect to women's inclusion in social security. Rural women's lack of access to social protection is the result of two main factors: weaknesses within the social security system at the national level, and gender-related aspects. Furthermore, there has been very little progress with respect to the division of work between men and women, given that women are usually responsible for producing food for their families. Regarding agricultural employment, the largest concentration of women is involved in family farming, particularly in subsistence-oriented smallholdings (*minifundios*), which have low productivity levels and little economic viability.

The possibility of reducing poverty primarily depends on two factors: on the one hand, the acquisition of income and supplies from productive participation, and, on the other hand, access to primarily public forms of support that are available to families and communities. With respect to the second factor, different programs aimed at reducing poverty have been promoted in the region, especially conditional cash transfer programs, which have played a role in reducing extreme poverty in rural areas. However, the coverage of these forms of public aid should not be overestimated; according to estimates by ECLAC, only 20% of rural households in the region receive some form of public transfer (ECLAC, 2018). This, in turn, makes the first factor all the more relevant; as a result, it becomes necessary to carefully examine women's productive involvement in rural areas.

### **Rural women's productive involvement**

Statistical records show a considerable difference between women and men with respect to economic activity. It is important to emphasize, however, that this statistical information is influenced by difficulties experienced in collecting information on the productive activity of women who categorize themselves as inactive in terms of employment; as a result, a large part of this economically active population in agriculture is rendered invisible. According to estimates by FAO, at least half of the women who include themselves in that category actually carry out activities that can contribute to agricultural production (FAO, 2016). Moreover, formal records show that while 52% of rural women categorize themselves as inactive, only 15% of men do so. This difference is particularly evident in agricultural production: only a fifth of women, compared to 53% of men, are involved in this sector. These differences are not as apparent in non-agricultural rural employment (NARE), where men's rate of employment is only slightly higher than that of women.

There are noticeable differences in rural women's employment depending on their age group. Young women (aged 15 to 29) show a higher level of inactivity, due to the fact that a part of that group is still in the education system. Agricultural rural employment primarily involves women over the age of 30. On the other hand, the rate of migration to cities is higher among young rural women.

Rural women's productive involvement is characterized by multi activity. In general, rural women are categorized as: a) half inactive, half active; b) of the latter group, half carries out agricultural work and the other half is involved in non-agricultural work; and c) the greatest difference between the latter two groups is that most women in the first group are non-wage earners, while the opposite is the case in non-agricultural rural employment.

In short, rural women's employment is divided into the following categories:

**a) *Family farming***

Nearly two-thirds of women involved in rural agricultural employment do family farming, although two specific subsectors can be distinguished. The first is subsidiary work in family farming, which comprises the large group of women who are registered as unpaid family workers, as well as those who categorize themselves as inactive but who carry out some type of production activity. The most distinctive characteristic of this type of work is the fact that women do not receive their own income, which affects half of rural women in the region. The second subsector is made up of independent peasant women, who manage farms that, for the most part, are categorized as subsistence-oriented smallholdings (*minifundios*). It is important to note that, while this type of productive involvement (subsistence-oriented smallholdings) is mentioned, the very small sector of female-led SMEs is disregarded in this report due to the fact that these women are either no longer involved in family farming or form part of the very small sector of family farming with access to markets, which represents only 12% of the total in LAC, and in which women's involvement is limited.

**b) *Agricultural wage employment***

Although it does not include a very large number of rural women, this segment is rapidly growing, especially in some countries as a result of the growing regulated production of certain products such as fruits and flowers (Ballara and Parada/FAO-ECLAC, 2009).

**c) *Non-agricultural rural employment (NARE)***

Rural women's presence in this sector is similar to that of women in agricultural employment, which is not the case for rural men, whose participation in agricultural employment almost doubles their involvement in NARE. The majority of these women are wage earners; a

third of them are independent workers or owners, primarily in the fields of trade, and specific types of manufacturing (such as handicrafts).

The vast majority of female employment in rural areas is concentrated in these three sectors. In the case of agricultural or non-agricultural wage earners, wage levels and employment conditions are the main issues; they are generally lower than that of their male counterparts or of urban wage earners. Female independent workers in NARE primarily work in microenterprises within the informal sector of the economy.

The difficulties faced by women involved in family farming are even more complex. On the one hand, the large number of women who are unpaid family workers, or who categorize themselves as inactive, lack income of their own. Overcoming this situation through access to land ownership, which does not happen very often (only 16% of production units in LAC are led by women), does not enable them to pull themselves out of poverty, due to the fact that most of them work in subsistence-oriented smallholdings of very limited size: “the majority of female-led farms are of a small size (usually less than one hectare)” (Salcedo and Guzmán/FAO, 2014).

In those productive units, women obtain basic food for their families, but they do not generate sufficient income to pull themselves out of poverty, especially considering existing gaps in their access to other assets. According to FAO, “although the panorama between countries is heterogeneous, studies always detect unfavorable gaps for women in terms of technical assistance, training and access to credit” (FAO, 2016). The conclusion is that “rural women’s work is key to the subsistence of their homes; however, because of its precariousness, it cannot serve as a lever to lift them out of poverty” (Ballara and Parada/FAO-ECLAC, 2009). For the vast majority of rural women, improving their living conditions and overcoming poverty will depend on substantial improvement in the performance of the two aforementioned factors. On the one hand, the coverage of social protection systems should improve, given that they are currently unavailable to three-quarters of the rural population; this involves expanding conditional cash transfer programs as well. On the other hand, women’s productive participation must generate sufficient income and resources to enable them to pull themselves out of poverty. Special attention is given here to the latter factor.

In the case of wage-earning women, both in agricultural and non-agricultural rural employment, the efficiency of this mechanism depends on the ability to achieve decent work; that is, work with wages and employment conditions that are in keeping with labor regulations. Within this context, public action plays a key role, primarily through the Ministries of Labor and their labor inspection departments in particular, more so than through rural development ministries or entities.

In the case of female family farmers, there has been a progressive transition toward registration as independent peasants, which is frequently regarded as the traditional strategy to improve the condition of rural women in agricultural rural

employment. However, becoming involved in subsistence farming as producers may imply settling into structural poverty. Sufficient evidence demonstrates that while the low level of productivity, as well as the low economic viability of subsistence-oriented smallholdings may guarantee food for the family, it does not allow for overcoming poverty. To achieve progress in this regard, outweighing the structural limits of subsistence-oriented smallholdings is crucial.

The ability to achieve improvements in this regard is conditioned by age-related differences among rural women. In the case of young women, if they choose not to migrate to the city or participate in non-agricultural rural employment, and instead continue to be involved in agricultural production, their ability to break away from subsistence family farming will depend on their professional qualifications, especially given the technological advances that are currently taking place. Although women of all ages should be able to join the universe of human resources with sufficient technological skills, either in technical positions of dynamic sectors or in decision-making positions, it is reasonable to assume that young women will be better equipped in this regard; naturally, this will also require support from public policies and cooperation agencies.

In the case of older women, their ability to break free from the limits of subsistence family farming primarily depends on their ability to engage in more dynamic sectors of agriculture. Two instruments are proposed in this regard: the first is for women to enter into effective production chains, and the second is to work toward the restructuring of plots of land. This is the basic condition required to increase productivity and substantially increase the economic viability of production units, especially within the context of progressive smallholdings such as in Mexico and Central America; this, in turn, would allow for sustainably overcoming poverty. Public authorities, international cooperation agencies, and other socioeconomic stakeholders must offer incentives to women smallholder farmers to enable them to lead land concentration processes through the creation of productive associations, cooperatives, etc., as proposed by FAO's Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure (2012). On this basis, policies should aim to provide women with access to other assets such as credit, technical training, market access, etc., generating a positive impact that will substantially increase the possibility of overcoming poverty for most rural women involved in agricultural production.

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# Opportunities and representation for rural women

Being organized in associations and cooperatives enables women to gain economic ground together, which increases their self-esteem, breaks down barriers and helps them surmount challenges

*Tereza Cristina Corrêa da Costa Dias\**

Women's participation in the labor market is on the rise, not only in Brazil's large urban centers, but also in rural areas. According to data published in the 2017 Agricultural Census Report of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), of the more than 15 million people who work in rural areas, 19% are women, amounting to more than 2,800,000 people.

The study clearly shows that women are carving out an increasingly prominent role in agribusiness management. At least two out of every ten rural farm managers are women. A 2017 survey on the Habits of Rural Producers, carried out by the Brazilian Association of Rural Marketing and Agribusiness (ABMRA), indicated that almost one third of the administrative positions on rural farms were held by women. Comparing these figures to data from 2012, we can see that female participation increased threefold, jumping from 10% to 31%.

The Brazilian Agribusiness Association (ABAG) carried out a study that stated that women primarily work in smallholdings (49.5%) and smaller properties (26.1%). Moreover, 73% of these women work on the farm,

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performing tasks ranging from the operation of agricultural machinery to business management.

Although women represent almost 50% of the rural population, they are socially and economically vulnerable. The Federal Government has introduced measures to tackle this situation, through various public policies that promote cooperativism and sustainability, as well as social and production inclusion, with a focus on rural women. They also aim to afford women a more prominent role in the process of marketing their products and managing the income earned from their work. For example, by organizing themselves into associations and cooperatives, women are able to access economic opportunities collectively, which increases their self-esteem and helps them to overcome challenges and to break through barriers of prejudice.

Access to credit enables women to invest in income-earning production activities. This not only improves the standard of living of families, for example, by increasing food security, it provides women with greater independence and empowers them, thus contributing to greater equality between and women, in the family and in the community. According to data from the Central Bank, women received 25% of the loans awarded by the National Program to Strengthen Family Farming (PRONAF) in 2016. In some states, such as Ceará and Piauí, the figure was as much as 44% and 46%, respectively. Some 400 thousand women are at the forefront of this process, which represents a critical tool in guaranteeing the empowerment of rural women. Brazil has also instituted the National Family Farming Seal (SENAF Mulher), which seeks to recognize and empower women, by providing them with the autonomy to produce and market their products, while also strengthening and fostering production activities. This Program recognizes the contribution of women to food sovereignty and their importance to sustainable development,

by highlighting their role as economic agents and political stakeholders.

Data from the Ministry of Citizenship indicates that more than 48% of suppliers in the Food Acquisition Program (PAA) are women. This Brazilian initiative has gained international recognition for having managed to link the strengthening of family farming to the production of healthy food, to ensure that healthy food is made available to people experiencing food insecurity.

Although the size of land holdings and the salary levels of



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women may not match up to those of men, this series of public policies focusing on this segment of the population represents an important step in promoting equality between men and women in rural areas. Decision-making by female landowners and the strength of rural female workers is changing the status quo of Brazil's agricultural landscape.

The goal is for all activities related to agribusiness in Brazil to become increasingly inclusive, supported by an increasingly qualified workforce. Indeed, women tend to pursue specialized training more than men. Both in rural and urban areas, women's level of schooling surpasses that of men. There is also an expectation that women born in rural areas and trained in the city will return to their roots, using their knowledge to contribute to the production chain in rural areas.

When female rural producers gain the same access to production and financial resources, as well as similar opportunities for income, education and services as men, this will boost agricultural production considerably and will significantly reduce the hunger and poverty indexes. With the support of policies that seek to guarantee independence and gender equality for rural women, we can further the process of empowerment and achieve higher standards of living and better working conditions for women in the countryside.

### **Public policies for inclusion**

Another important aspect is care for the environment. In Brazil, we must take better care of our water resources, especially by collecting rainwater. We are currently developing an important program that will consolidate micro-watersheds in order to utilize the water collected in agriculture, as well as guarantee constant water supply for the population. In Australia, the country's water supply has limited the growth of its agriculture sector. Although water is abundant in Brazil, it is crucial that we take greater care of this resource and that we build small dams to retain water that would otherwise run off. The states of São Paulo and Paraná have implemented interesting micro-watershed programs that could be replicated across the entire country in a manner that is environmentally friendly and places women at the forefront. The world is well aware of the fact that it is experiencing climate change. Our farmers are the most ardent defenders of the environment because their work depends on the conservation of the environment. In Brazil, we carry out a great deal of conservation efforts. As an example, our country transitioned from being a net importer of food, to a top food exporter. We increased our productivity by 346%, while expanding our farming area by just 33%. Brazil implemented a rigorous Forest Code unlike any other in the world, which estimates that native vegetation is protected in up to 80% of rural properties.

Our efforts must also aim to generate increasingly favorable conditions for the work carried out by farmers. Rural territories must offer more and better services. To this end, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply (MAPA) has implemented a program together with the Ministry of Science, Technology, Innovation and Communications (MCTIC) entitled Agro 4.0 Chamber. The program will allow for increasing connectivity levels in rural areas, as well as

driving actions to transform Brazil into an exporter of Internet of Things solutions for agribusinesses, which are crucial to producing in a more sustainable manner (that is, without the need to expand cultivated areas). This program also focuses attention on small-scale male and female producers.

Through this program, we will boost connectivity levels for the regions of Brazil that need it most, such as the Northern, Northeast and Midwest regions. In the Northeast, the second most populated region of the country, more than 20 million dollars will be invested to increase connectivity in rural areas. In the Northern region, 9 million dollars will be allocated.

The Dom Hélder Chamber project benefited 57,486 rural families in Brazil's semi-arid region through the provision of continuous technical assistance. This project is the result of an association between MAPA's Secretariat of Agriculture and Family Cooperatives (SAF), IFAD and the National Agency for Technical Assistance and Rural Extension (ANATER). The project facilitates the implementation of actions aimed at combating poverty and supporting sustainable rural development in Brazil's semi-arid regions. Through the integration of federal, state and municipal public policies, the project seeks to reduce inequality by moderating the effects caused by adverse climatic conditions.

Another important program that provides support to rural families is the Action Plan for the Northeast (AgroNordeste), which is coordinated by MAPA. The objective of the plan is to support the organization of agricultural chains, expand and diversify marketing channels, as well as increase the efficiency of production and social benefits in the Northeast.

The plan, which has been deemed a priority, was developed by a multidisciplinary team, to provide support in overcoming the challenges facing farmers in Brazil's Northeast region. The plan will provide solutions to overcome issues that limit competitiveness, and will assist in improving production systems. It will also contribute to broadening the access of rural producers in this region to various markets, credit opportunities, technical assistance services and new technologies, especially for the development of value-added products and strategies during droughts.

AgroNordeste was developed in early 2019, based on field visits carried out in the states of Piauí, Ceará, Paraíba, Rio Grande del Norte, Sergipe, Alagoas, Bahia and Pernambuco, where my team and I learned about various production and marketing initiatives, and were able to observe the reality of farmers in the Northeast region. Based on our findings, we decided to focus, at least initially, on eight micro-regions. Eventually, this area will be expanded to include additional beneficiaries.

We have also published the bylaws that define the plan's management model. We established an AgroNordeste Management Unit that is connected to my office, as well as a Central Coordinating Committee and Coordinating Committees in the different states, to assist in implementing projects at the local level.

The Central Coordinating Committee is comprised of all of the secretariats and federal agencies attached to the Ministry, such as the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA), the National Supply Company (CONAB), the National Meteorology Institute (INMET) and the Brazilian Forestry Service, as well as relevant institutions such as the National Rural Learning Service (SENAR) and the Brazilian Support Service for Micro and Small Enterprises (SEBRAE).

This initiative is an example of a valuable partnership between the government and society, in which rural families, and rural women in particular, are a top priority and the focus of State actions.



# Rural Women: The Need for a Development Model with a Differentiated Approach

By failing to understand the role of rural women in the financial affairs of the family, decision-makers will be prone to commit mistakes

*Carmen Rosa de León-Escribano\**

When we examine the situation of rural women in Guatemala, we cannot overlook the fact that discrimination against and marginalization of this group has reached peak levels for three reasons: they are women; they are poor and they are indigenous people. By failing to understand their needs, and more importantly, the role they play in the financial affairs of the family, decision-makers will be prone to commit mistakes, not only in public policy, but more alarmingly, in creating agricultural, economic and food security development programs.

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With the continuous flow of migration of rural farmers – stemming from inequality and a lack of investment policies and credit facilities -, we are seeing an increasing number of women assuming control of the rural production unit. Agricultural extension services failed to immediately recognize the urgency of supporting and providing technical resources for these women who had been left in charge of farming activities, with a consequent impact on the quality of products for consumption. This situation has been changing in some countries, but the lack of resources and expertise in agricultural production in the rural economy, coupled with the inflow of remittances

from migrants to the United States, has led to a gradual abandonment of the land, which has impacted the national economy.

In recent years, increased remittances from the United States have been instrumental in the incorporation of the female head of the household, who is the primary recipient of these resources, into the financial system. This trend has been further reinforced by conditional cash transfer programs that have been established in several countries in the region. A 2016 survey by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) indicated that 55% (3,417,413 million) of recipients of remittances from the United States are women. Twenty-five percent of remittance beneficiaries are heads of household, 41.4% of these being women. According to the report, although just over 22% of households, at the national level, are headed by females, in the case of remittance-receiving households, the figure is twice that amount, “meaning that women - who have a partner abroad - assume new roles, make decisions in the home and participate in community activities, while also shouldering the responsibility of educating and caring for their children”. (IOM, 2016:23). Fifty-point-five percent of remittance beneficiaries live in rural areas.

This data reinforces the need to establish strategies to ensure the participation of women, allowing them to transcend their role as passive recipients of resources from abroad, and to assume an active role through their increasing impact on the local and national economy.

However, in a country with high levels of discrimination against women, and in particular rural and indigenous women, generating actions that address everyone’s needs, could prove to be a daunting challenge. The relative importance of remittances to local economies makes them an attractive target for different financial entities and mechanisms – most of them non-banking -, which provide informal credit arrangements that eventually saddle the women with abusive interest rates and lengthy repayment periods for purchases of consumer goods.

*The development of a strategy that understands and addresses the rural woman, based on her reality and needs, is a matter of urgency. Experience has shown that, from saving to managing family finances, women are capable of generating wealth and changing their environment. What is lacking is a model, based on a comprehensive approach, that is tailored to the unique circumstances of rural women. It should provide them access to education, the development of entrepreneurial skills, credit and market opportunities, allowing them to develop production processes and chains at the individual level, and as a group, to generate collective wealth and an acceptable standard of living for themselves and for their community.”*

Therefore, in a climate in which investment policies in the farming economy are lacking, and in which the development model has contributed to high levels of social and cultural exclusion of most of the population, the creation of real and practical alternatives to incorporate women into economic and development processes, in a manner that promotes dignity and personal and family growth, seems impossible. Moreover, it would call for an interdisciplinary effort that would have to encompass different perspectives, in order to arrive at comprehensive solutions, in often adverse environments. In my view, there are three areas that require urgent intervention, and which have proven to be viable approaches, based on real life experience.

## **1. Financial education for change**

Given the increased income of rural women who receive foreign remittances, on the one hand, and their growing impact on the local economy, on the other, these communities have experienced an influx of businesses that offer easy credit, taking advantage of the limited financial knowledge of these women to exploit them and drive them into debt. Financial education programs tend not to target rural women because they are monolingual and poor, and instead focus on individuals with higher levels of education and greater resources, which would qualify them to receive credit.

One example that illustrates misconceptions in the traditional approach of these programs, is the fact that the Institute for Education on Sustainable Development (IEPADES, Spanish acronym), has been working with rural, indigenous and extremely poor women since 2010, by strengthening their knowledge in areas such as saving and community loan schemes. Based on the methodology of *Saving for Change*, we have used an integrated approach to develop a new process to strengthen these groups of women by educating them on how to manage their savings and also training them to become community leaders, and consequently agents of real change. In 2010, our goal was to register 400 women in savings groups, each with an initial deposit of as little as US \$2.00. This year we catered to more than 13,000 women, organized into more than 600 groups that not only focus on saving, but impact the community and actively participate in local decisions, many of them through networks that have been established to improve efficiency. Each member has accumulated savings of approximately US\$612.00.

The methodology that we have been developing has also involved training these women to cultivate their home gardens (focusing on agroecology, independence and food security), and/or to enhance craft-making skills. The attempt to identify markets by organizing municipal fairs to sell products, in strategic partnership with municipal councils, is a means of facilitating networking and encouraging participants to meet and to exchange good practices. In collaboration with other entities, such as the Procuraduría de Derechos Humanos (Human Rights Ombudsman), Defensoría de la Mujer Indígena (Office for the Defense of Indigenous Women), the Oficinas Municipales de la Mujer (Municipal Women's Bureau), and some ministry programs, we have been instrumental in strengthening leadership

and growth on a personal and a group level, and consequently, have had a positive effect on the community. More than 70% of savings is used for short-term loans among members of the group, for the purpose of small businesses, education (particularly of girls), health, food and agriculture.

Building on this experience, IEDPADES is seeking to take the process one step further, focusing on two objectives: to provide access to banking services for the majority of members, for security reasons as well as to integrate them into the financial system; and to find a way of assisting small businesses and networks to become competitive entities that can increase the resources and quality of life of women and their families. Not only will this require a relationship with the banks, but also the development of an entrepreneurial outlook that takes into account the reality of these women, rather than adopting a traditional approach.

The most frequent complaints filed at the Ministry of the Public Service in Guatemala involve cases of violence within the family. Our institution has been working for years in the area of prevention. We have reached the conclusion that training women in these issues will have no significant effect unless women have their own resources, thus providing them with economic independence. The women recognize this, as evidenced by the exponential growth of the groups.

## **2. Financial inclusion/ development bank**

It is therefore clear that these collective saving programs and their various components allow women to evolve and grow, as individuals, and to be strengthened through their participation in groups. However, in order for them to reach the stage where they have a greater impact on the economy, women will undoubtedly require specific products that recognize the needs of the users themselves and are developed with this in mind. An example that is worth mentioning is the effort of Guatemala's Rural Development Bank to develop services specifically geared towards financial inclusion.

Two of the most significant innovations in this area have been the use of fingerprint recognition technology to activate banking services and the installation at the national level of automated teller machines that accommodate the Mayan languages. These two elements have been fundamental in incorporating the Mayan rural population into the banking system, but have been particularly beneficial to rural, indigenous women. Not only can they use this service to manage their bank accounts, but they can also use it as a mechanism to receive remittances from the United States, as well as conditional cash transfers from government programs, as required.

On the other hand, the bank has developed custom-made financial products and services, incorporating value added components that foster and promote health, and the financial education of families and communities. For example, the "Señora Cuenta" (Her Account) product has more than 1.8 million account holders (each with an average savings of US \$283 and a total portfolio value of more than US \$52.5 million), who receive financial education and technical training for their



businesses. This also allows them to access microinsurance, geared towards preventive health for women. On the other hand, the Grameen model is also being pushed (community development bank), and now includes almost 100,000 women, with credit of more than US \$1.5 million.

The success of the financial inclusion schemes established by BANRURAL demonstrates the importance of designing specialized products that recognize the needs and the realities of women. The challenge is to incorporate the essential components of entrepreneurship into these products, in order to promote the development of production networks and small businesses that can become successful in an environment that is often not conducive to rural entrepreneurship.

### **3. Entrepreneurship**

Having discussed the abovementioned examples, let us now turn to the third area that must be addressed in order to make a meaningful contribution to the development of rural women: investment and the strengthening of entrepreneurship skills, as a means of ensuring greater and more significant impact on the economic growth of women. Referencing the work of other authors, Sancho (2010:72) states that a work model to strengthen agricultural entrepreneurship should include four consecutive steps:

- a) Organization of farmers;
- b) Support services;
- c) Commerce, “learning by doing”; and
- d) Credit

In other words, successful experience has shown that the situation of rural women requires a partnership between stakeholders who can develop a roadmap that includes these four elements in the process. In fact, if organization, financial education and credit already exist, the next step is to collaborate in finding channels to sell products, but prior to that, determining which products are innovative and feasible enough to be successful. To do so, they must identify the distinctive elements that enable women to develop strategies based on their own reality and in keeping with their needs and potential, bolstered by adequate technical resources, as well as by financial products tailored to their context and geographic location.

Having said this, a primary factor that is missing in this scenario is the development of differentiated public policy, targeting women in general, and in particular rural women. These policies must recognize women as agents and stakeholders of development and social change. While acknowledging that policy has failed to address rural communities, in general, providing limited access to innovation and credit, programs targeting rural woman are non-existent.

In an environment as biased as the production and rural world, women have not been identified as stakeholders in economic development, but merely as passive players, through their receipt of remittances. Therefore, the development of a strategy that understands and addresses the rural woman, based on her own realities and needs, is a matter of urgency. Experience has shown us that from saving, to managing family finances, they are capable of generating wealth and changing their environment. What is lacking is a development model, based on a comprehensive approach, tailored to the unique circumstances of rural women. It should provide them access to education, the development of entrepreneurial skills, credit and market opportunities, thus allowing them to develop production processes and chains, at the individual level, and as a group to generate collective wealth and an acceptable standard of living for themselves and for their community.

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# How Crop Diversity and the Efforts of Rural Women Are Bringing Latin America More Nutritious Food

Self-sustaining value chains are emerging as women use improved varieties to produce value-added products

*Marie Haga\**

Latin America is engaged in a renewed effort to end hunger and malnutrition, with women leading the way. This effort begins with the enormous and fascinating diversity of the crops that power Latin American agriculture – and it is here, in agriculture, that women play the first critical role. As men migrate to cities or across borders in search of work, it is largely women who remain behind to tend farms, thus generating food and income for millions of rural households.

Tending a farm is a balancing act: what is affordable to grow, what will sell at the market, and what will produce a reliable harvest in unreliable weather? Farmers answer questions like these through the crops they plant, and the greater the diversity of useful crops and varieties that is available to them, the more answers they have.

If a field is too dry, or too high in the mountains, or too poor in soil nutrients for one type of maize – and it is often women who have to settle for these more challenging fields – then another type of maize, or another crop altogether, may still bring a harvest. Planting beans is often good for the soil, but again there are choices to make: some bean varieties survive diseases that decimate others; or cook faster than others; or, in the end, pack more of a nutritional punch than others.

\* Executive Director  
of Crop Trust

In this regard, conserving and using diversity is not just a solution for better farming; it fills an entire toolbox of solutions to put in farmers' hands. In Latin America, malnutrition is one rising challenge that this toolbox is well equipped to meet.

With so many questions to answer, women and men who make farming decisions can seldom give their first thought to the vitamin and mineral content of what they plant, eat and sell. Yet all over Latin America, deficiencies in zinc and iron especially, add up to an enormous problem. They represent a 'hidden hunger' that weakens immune systems and causes serious health problems such as anemia, blindness, stunting, learning difficulties, and even premature death. While hunger may not be as serious here as in other parts of the world, it is now on the rise across the continent, and malnutrition remains a constant threat.<sup>1</sup>

In Guatemala, some 47 percent of children under the age of five are stunted while 17 percent suffer from chronic malnutrition – a figure that reaches 53 percent in rural areas and 66 percent among indigenous communities.<sup>2</sup> In Colombia, one in four children under the age of one suffers from iron deficiency, and 27 percent of boys and girls aged 6-59 months are anemic. At the same time, the continent is also facing an obesity epidemic as a consequence of bad diets: some seven per cent of children, a third of adolescents, and more than half of adults are now overweight or obese.<sup>3</sup>



*We believe that greater investment and research into the potential of biofortification can bring nourishment and hope to the lives of up to a billion people by 2030. But first, this will mean acknowledging two basic truths: That crop diversity is essential to answering the challenges of the global food system, and that women are essential – as farmers, as scientists, and as decision-makers – to putting crop diversity to work.”*

The lifelong disadvantages of these problems trap entire families in cycles of poverty, poor health and diminished possibilities for the future. But these cycles can be broken. Nutrition is a first step – and here, some of the answers are now in the hands of farmers, thanks to ingenious applications of crop diversity.

### **Biofortifying the Latin American diet**

Latin America desperately needs a reliable and nutritious supply of food to address hunger and

1 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2017. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2017: Building resilience for peace and food security. FAO, Rome.  
2 MSPAS, INE and ICF. 2017. Encuesta Nacional de Salud Materno Infantil [National Survey of Maternal and Child Health] 2014–2015. MSPAS/INE/ICF, Guatemala.  
3 FAO and OPS. 2017. Panorama de la Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional en América Latina y el Caribe [Panorama of Food Security and Nutrition in Latin America and the Caribbean]. FAO, Rome.

malnutrition. The diversity of the world's food crops holds the tools to achieve this, too. Among the practical and cost-effective strategies for putting this diversity into use is biofortification: increasing the density of vitamins and minerals in a crop through conventional plant breeding, so that when the crop is consumed regularly across a country or region, it will generate constant improvements in nutritional status.

As with many plant breeding efforts, the process of biofortification starts with the crop diversity held in genebanks. Genebanks conserve the full global diversity of crops – created through thousands of years of adaptation and innovation by countless farmers – and make it available for breeders to study, test and use in developing new varieties. The Crop Trust works with genebanks to conserve this material for the long term, making it available to form the foundation of tomorrow's food security, agricultural adaptability, and nutrition.

Biofortification through plant breeding has been well proven in the field, largely thanks to the work of HarvestPlus. They have been developing and scaling up biofortified staple food crops that deliver higher amounts of vitamin A, zinc and iron – the three micronutrients that the World Health Organization has identified as most lacking in diets worldwide. As part of the CGIAR Research Program on Agriculture for Nutrition and Health, breeders utilize the genetic material available in CGIAR genebanks and apply conventional breeding and modern technology to develop high-yielding and nutritious crop varieties that are adapted to the needs and preferences of farmers, including, crucially, rural women.

So far, some 29 biofortified crops have been released to national partners: five cassava varieties in Brazil and Nicaragua; seven sweet potato varieties in Brazil, Panama, Guatemala and Haiti; 15 bean varieties in Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Panama; and two maize varieties in Honduras, Nicaragua, Colombia and Brazil. To give an illustration of the nutritional impact these varieties deliver, one bean variety released in Guatemala contains 84 percent more iron than conventional varieties.

### **Vitamins and minerals today, diversity forever**

Biofortification is the kind of work that can only be achieved by thinking of crop diversity as a shared global good. It is also the kind of work that will no longer be possible if too much diversity disappears. Unfortunately, this is what is happening: underappreciated and left behind by the pace of change, diversity disappears from farmers' fields and from nature every day. At the Crop Trust, our role is to ensure that it persists in collections, where breeders can find it, forever.

In fact, this is the core of our mission. It is why the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and CGIAR created the Crop Trust in 2004. Since then, we have been building up an endowment fund that will provide long-term funding for priority genebanks around the world and achieve an absolutely secure future for crop diversity. We have oversight and financial responsibility

for genebanks that together represent the largest collection of agrobiodiversity in the world.

When the global public good of crop diversity is put to use, the breakthroughs are not only in nutrition. The toolbox of diversity is also full of traits that allow farmers and their crops to respond to environmental stresses. The International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) in Mexico has developed varieties of maize that survive exceptional droughts; the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) in Colombia has bred more heat-tolerant bean plants; and the International Potato Center (CIP) in Peru is adapting traditional potato varieties to resist late blight, a disease that is spreading to higher altitudes as temperatures rise. These are all ways of adapting food production to climate change. And none of these options would have been possible without combing through genebanks to find the critical traits.

We also work with national genebanks in Latin America, which hold stunning diversity of their own in this birthplace of so many of humanity's most important foods. We have worked with the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) to host and train genebank managers from all over the region, and it has been wonderful to bring together so many dedicated people and institutions. It has been wonderful, too, to be a part of training current and future generations of scientists in collecting, conserving and using crop diversity.

Meanwhile, we are funding the collecting efforts of many countries – among them Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Peru – as our national partners search in remote regions for the wild relatives of crops like potato, sweet potato and bean. Some partners, such as Chile's Agricultural Research Institute (INIA) and Zamorano in Honduras, also participate in global pre-breeding efforts to cross wild relatives with domesticated crops and make their special traits useful to breeders. The fruits of these efforts will be crops that are sturdier, more resilient, and more tolerant to drought, salinity, flooding, heat, frost... anything the future may bring.

### **From genebanks to crops to the women who grow them**

There is a long road between the genebank and the family farm, and crop conservationists can't always see the changes their work enables. It is therefore a great joy when diversity from the genebank can have as immediate an impact on the lives of farmers as it has through biofortification.

Many of these farmers have shared their stories. One is Valdileia de Moura, a 21-year-old farmer from Piauí, a semi-arid and drought-prone state in the north-east of Brazil. Valdileia adopted biofortified beans and drip irrigation and has seen her yields increase substantially, despite the adverse conditions she is forced to contend with.

Another is Olivia Chunj Mijcohc, a 50-year-old farmer from the Totonicapán district of Guatemala. She adopted an iron-rich and higher-yielding variety of bean – ICTA Superchiva<sup>ACM</sup> – which takes significantly less time to cook. In recent

years Olivia has been able to feed her family well, and sell surplus produce at the local market, providing an additional source of income.

Francisca Chun Tayun from San Bartolo, also in Guatemala, cultivates the same variety. Motivated by the health benefits for her young children, she also achieved higher yields and was able to save seed for subsequent years. Her enthusiasm for the iron-rich bean means that she now actively promotes the variety to other farmers.

Women farmers have been as integral to this success as they are integral to farming itself. From the beginning of the HarvestPlus initiative they have provided guidance on preferred crop traits, emphasizing the need for varieties that cooked quickly, for instance, or had shiny skins so they would attract buyers in local markets. Crop diversity then allowed breeders to develop nutritionally superior varieties that also met these needs.

Now that the biofortified crops are ready, designated ‘champions’ – often pioneering women farmers – have become ambassadors for the varieties, promoting their benefits to neighboring farmers and communities. This strategic farmer-to-farmer interaction has been one of the most rewarding aspects of the initiative. Self-sustaining value chains are emerging as women use the improved varieties to produce value-added products.

Meanwhile, there is a rising number of young female scientists working on the initiative who will go on to fill leadership positions in agricultural research as the older generation of researchers retire during the next few years. It is exciting to see developments that could reorient research across the region – making it more gender-sensitive and responsive to the interests and needs of women farmers.

The future possibilities of agricultural research in Latin America, based on rich agrobiodiversity and the active participation of farmers, are truly exciting. And that excitement builds on what has already been achieved. This is nothing less than the development and enhancement of a food system that efficiently links international genebanks and advanced crop science with the priorities of farmers and the nutritional needs of all people.

We believe that greater investment and research into the potential of biofortification can bring nourishment and hope to the lives of up to a billion people by 2030. But first, this will mean acknowledging two basic truths: That crop diversity is essential to answering the challenges of the global food system, and that women are essential – as farmers, as scientists, and as decision-makers – to putting crop diversity to work.





# Agriculture's future is female

It is essential that rural women be encouraged to participate in the political arena. A century after women's suffrage was introduced, women are still underrepresented in Germany's parliaments

*Julia Klöckner\**

## The future of agriculture is female

There's one thing I should make quite clear to readers from the outset: I personally have been very privileged. I grew up in a country and at a time in which women's rights were no longer a subject of negotiation. Nevertheless, it was and still is a time in which there is much to be done to ensure that women can contribute to the same degree as men in all areas of public life and hold executive positions. To ensure that it is not them by default who must give up their career or assume an extreme double burden as soon as they start a family. Yet this is also a time in which the position of women in our society can be regarded as highly exemplary - we have had a woman at the head of our government for many years: Dr. Angela Merkel.

Agriculture has many facets: In many countries it can symbolise strenuous manual labour, whilst in others it is a high-tech and digitalized part of the economy. Whilst in some barren and dry regions of the world, agriculture struggles to produce anything from nature's scarce resources, in other regions of the earth harvests seem to crop up as if by themselves.

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*There are women working on nearly every farm in Germany. The latest figures show there are around 341,000 women active in the agricultural sector. But of the 276,000 farm managers in Germany, in the year 2016 just 9% of these were women. According to a survey<sup>1</sup> in which 514 women in agriculture between the ages of 18 and 39 took part, 25% of these women were employed either full-time or part-time on farms. Just 29% of these women were self-employed. The majority - around 40%- provided information that they were working with no contract at all."*

Yet despite the fundamental differences in their requirements - such as climatic conditions, types of cultivation and the degree of technology in use - in many ways, agriculture is similar all over the world: Agriculture provides us all with the basis for the food we eat and as such is a conditio sine qua non for our existence. Agriculture is thus not just any sector; it is a sector devoted to life and its essentials.

But who we mean when we speak of "agriculture"? Who are the people behind this term? In many regions of the world the majority of these people are female! It is predominantly women who are feeding the world!

Unfortunately, the contribution they make is not always appreciated to the same extent.

Quite on the contrary: In my opinion, we must make efforts to counteract this lack of awareness and appreciation.

### **Rural women around the world**

The 2030 Agenda adopted by the United Nations therefore quite rightly underlines the significance of gender equality. This is not just a goal in itself but also an overarching guiding principle which is laid down in 11 of the 17 SDGs. No country can expect to develop successfully if it does not include the capabilities, knowledge and creativity of half of its society. In economic terms, this is an intolerable waste of resources.

And in terms of how we view and treat each other, discriminating against women in society is the sign of an outdated societal structure that urgently needs renewal. It is the responsibility of all people to ensure these changes take shape in our own societies. This is also why my ministry is working to support women in rural areas and women working in agriculture.

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<sup>1</sup> Agrarheute publication, 08.03.2019

The facts speak for themselves:

The role played by women in agriculture and rural areas is of global importance: Women form the backbone of our rural areas.

According to the World Farmers' Organization, 43% of people working in agriculture worldwide are women, in some countries up to 70% of the agricultural workforce are women. Women are responsible for 60-80% of global food production.

In many countries, whether industrialised or developing, rural women are also affected by poverty, poor education opportunities and inequality. Women often face meagre prospects of living and thriving in these areas.

Yet it is primarily the younger generations that are fighting for a better life in the country: Young rural women who show great enthusiasm and passion for improving the living conditions in their rural areas will not only ensure that these places will still be viable areas to live in the future. These women are also ensuring that their regions remain attractive and vibrant places.

### **Rural women in Germany**

There are women working on nearly every farm in Germany. The latest figures show there are around 341,000 women active in the agricultural sector. But of the 276,000 farm managers in Germany, in the year 2016 just 9% of these were women. According to a survey<sup>2</sup> in which 514 women in agriculture between the ages of 18 and 39 took part, 25% of these women were employed either full-time or part-time on farms. Just 29% of these women were self-employed. The majority - around 40% - provided information that they were working with no contract at all. The survey also showed that women are well qualified, around 68% of those surveyed had completed vocational training courses, 29% had a university education in agricultural studies and 22% had received business training.

90% of the women who responded in the survey were working in family businesses. One third of those surveyed stated that they worked more than 40 hours per week on the farm.

During their working hours, 67% of the women surveyed spent their time looking after the animals, 62% doing office work and 43% in operational management. Far fewer worked on the fields (around 24%), 14% did public relations work and 12% were active in direct sales of agricultural products.

53% of the women stated that they made business decisions together with their partner. Approximately 29% of the women are consulted in decision-making, but their partner has the final say. And around 10% have no influence at all over the

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<sup>2</sup> Agrarheute publication, 08.03.2019.

fate of the farm on which they live and work. Just 8% said that they alone make the business decisions of the farm.

Allow me to just translate what these figures mean expressed in terms of the daily lives of women in agriculture:

The majority of these women have received some form of agricultural training, over half has a university qualification in agricultural studies or business studies. They primarily work full-time, a large percentage of them works in operational management. What kind of appreciation, remuneration and decision-making power can these women expect? These women are family workers. They only appear in the statistics as the “spouse of the farm owner”. In many cases they do not have a work contract. Their social security depends therefore on their status as a farmer’s spouse. Even though many of the women have operational management duties, they cannot make decisions on their own about the future of the farm.

This paints a rather antiquated picture of farm life. Gender equality doesn’t yet seem to have fully taken hold on many farms. This must change! Agriculture is not just a male domain! It never was and never will be. In fact, many women often work on farms in addition to another job. They run the household, raise the children, care for their elderly parents. In many cases they are also volunteers at clubs and organisations or are active in politics at local government level. They help configure our social cohesion and shape the way we live in the countryside.

### **Organisations and networks for rural women**

These young female farmers have chosen a life in which they must put the needs of others before their own. Their daily lives are considerably different from the lives of the mothers in our cities who often drop off their child at the day-care center and then rush off to the next business meeting or conference. Women on the farm also have their hands full. They no longer simply come to terms with their situation, instead they are actively organising events and meeting, networking with each other and supporting one another. The LandFrauenverband (German Rural Women’s Association) is an example of one of these networks. It is dedicated to the lives of rural women; it addresses issues relevant to rural women and encourages them to become active in its work.

### **Rural women as entrepreneurs**

Starting a business opens new doors for women in rural areas. The LandFrauverband therefore supports an initiative to provide assistance for women in rural areas looking to establish a business and thereby build their own livelihood. This creates prospects for well-educated women to remain in rural areas and consequently improve these rural areas and their infrastructure. Starting a business can also be a step in becoming financially independent. It can be an opportunity to put the equal pay principle into practice. Female employers also act as role models.

## **Rural women in the political sphere**

It is also important to encourage rural women to be active on the political stage. Gender parity in parliament - this is standard we have set ourselves.

Approximately 100 years after the introduction of women's suffrage, women are still under-represented in German parliaments; this also applies for positions at municipal level. One example of this is the position of the district administrator, who is the highest-ranking official in a given district. Of the 294 elected officials, there are currently 28 women. That is a share of 9.5%<sup>3</sup>. Whether in municipal politics, rural administrative bodies, supervisory boards or on codetermination committees in the self-government structure of social security institutions: The percentage of women in all places and positions has been stagnating for a long time now. The LandFrauenverband has therefore launched a campaign called "Frauen!Wählen" (Vote Women) with the aim of considerably increasing the percentage of women on the administrative boards, boards of management and supervisory boards of the German statutory health, pension and accident insurance companies. Since the decisions made in these committees have a huge impact on the lives of those insured by them. Women must also have a say in these decisions!

## **Vibrant rural areas create a reason for residents to remain**

To ensure that women living in rural areas can actively partake in public life, we must provide reliable child day-care and dependable digital communication infrastructure. These components are intrinsically linked, they are the springboard which will allow women to become involved in public matters in rural areas.

We need people who care, want to shoulder responsibility, to get involved and address the issues that need our attention. We need people who are interested and committed to a cause and who want to share their knowledge. As such, having active players in civil society is just as important as functioning public services and the economic strength of a region. Time and again we have heard about the importance of tri-sector partnerships. We must vest equal attention in all three: the state, market and civil society. It is about time that we introduced policy measures to encourage a strong social community at municipal level to reinforce the liveliness of rural areas.

## **Volunteer work in rural areas**

Volunteering is an important part of life in vibrant villages. Over 30 million citizens in Germany participate in different ways in this type of work- from

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/gleichstellung-warum-frauen-in-der-kommunalpolitik-eine-minderheit-sind-a-1257217.html>

individual involvement in local activities to volunteer work in clubs, churches, in social work, in the voluntary fire brigade, in political and professional interest groups and in municipal parliaments. The Landfrauen in particular are often active as volunteers. To maintain these structures and expand on these we must support volunteers with full-time employees whose job it is to foster connections between civil society and municipal politics and recognise and value the work of volunteers.

Since only if this cooperation is appreciated will it continue to flourish.

### **Gender equality as one of objectives for funding of rural areas**

Equality between men and women is a fundamentally enshrined right. It is required by EU law that all European funding and support programmes promote gender equality.

It must therefore be our goal to improve the quality of life and working conditions of all women in rural areas. The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (ELER) is a key funding instrument in this regard.

Long-term funding programmes<sup>4</sup> have been created from the ELER which serve as an example in this field. These include many funding programmes which have helped provide better infrastructure for women. Only with this kind of approach can we ensure that there is a more equal participation between men and women at all levels of the individual programmes. The purposes of funding programmes in rural areas are manifold: e.g. to increase the percentage of women employed in the sector, to assist in establishing cooperative structures, to run equality campaigns. We want to use different funding measures to improve the infrastructure of women of all ages and for families, to reduce rural depopulation and create incentives for people to return to rural areas.

### **Study on rural women conducted by my ministry**

Politics is supposed to serve the citizens and therefore it cannot disregard these or their needs. One question in particular regularly plays on my mind: What is life really like for female farmers in Germany? What is their daily routine, how are their living and working conditions? Which possibilities do they have for their own further development, how can they educate themselves further, initiate growth processes and generate their own personal successes?

Furthermore: How is the transformation that is taking place in agriculture and society affecting the lives of women in rural areas?

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<sup>4</sup> E.g. The project "Innovative measures for women in rural areas" carried out by the federal state of Baden Württemberg, LEADER programme in the ELER.

We must search deeper for the answers to these questions. Only then will we know what exactly we are missing. And only then can we find tailor-made solutions which make life in the countryside more attractive and make life easier for rural women.

This is why my ministry is putting over half a million Euro into a study which will collect, record and evaluate all these aspects and initiatives. This will provide us with a scientific basis from which we will know how to better promote and support women in agriculture. It will also sound out new prospects and pave the way for these in the future. This study will present a verifiable framework of figures, data and facts which will help inform me about the necessary political action. Over a period of three years, over 30,000 women in agriculture will answer questions and the interviews with them will be analysed.

This will require a differentiated view of the challenges and burdens they experience. My goal is to increase the visibility of rural women's commitment to rural areas and to specifically promote the high potential for innovation in this sphere.

For our rural areas are the powerhouses of our country and the women in the countryside are the driving force behind them.





# Addressing the Persistent Gender Gaps Becomes Imperative to the Economic and Social Development of Our Region

We must overcome rural women's political exclusion

*Carmen Moreno\**

Created in 1928, the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) was the first inter-governmental agency established to ensure recognition of women's human rights. Since its establishment, the CIM has become the principal forum for debating and formulating policy on women's rights and gender equality in the Americas.

Throughout its ninety years, the CIM has actively engaged in working to secure women's rights and gender equality in the Americas. The legal and policy framework on women's rights and gender equality in our region is the most solid in the world, after that of Western Europe. The governments of the Americas have adopted legally-binding agreements, political statements and declarations of commitment on the human rights of women and gender equality, all which have become a strong legal and normative framework for the protection and guarantee of women's rights, and to punish discrimination and gender-based violence based in the Americas. Nevertheless, gaps persist between the normative and legal framework and practice in the actual implementation of women's human rights and equality.

More recently, with the approval of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its sustainable development

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Women (CIM),  
Organization of  
American States  
(OAS)

goals, countries committed to achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls (Sustainable Development Goal #5). This commitment includes several targets that are important to highlight in the current context: to 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; to recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family; to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life; and to eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation in rural areas.

Women need to have equal rights as men, which means equality in inheritance rights, the possibility of ownership of land, cattle and other economic resources, equal access to training both in agricultural and other areas useful in their environment, and they need to be knowledgeable in the managing of natural resources, especially water, and in ways and means to prevent or at least diminish the impact of the consequences of climate change. Women also need to have the right to receive education and access to new technologies and to learn about their rights and how

to defend them. Women also need to have the right to live free of violence and fear and to contribute to the well-being of their families and of their communities.

In analyzing the situation of women's human rights and gender equality, it is imperative to take into account intersectionality of other dimensions of discrimination, such as age, race, disabilities, migrants or displaced women, and rural women, among others. Discrimination and lack of access to rights is aggravated by these special situations of vulnerabilities, which perpetuates their lack of access to rights and equal treatment, and ultimately perpetuates their situation of poverty. In order to achieve gender equality, intersectionality needs to be taken into account.

*Women need to have equal rights as men, which means equality in inheritance rights, the possibility of ownership of land, cattle and other economic resources, equal access to training both in agricultural and other areas useful in their environment, and they need to be knowledgeable in the managing of natural resources, especially water, and in ways and means to prevent or at least diminish the impact of the consequences of climate change. Women also need to have the right to receive education and access to new technologies and to learn about their rights and how to defend them. Women also need to have the right to live free of violence and fear and to contribute to the well-being of their families and of their communities."*

Specifically for rural women, and according to statistics from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean), in Latin America, 40% of rural women over the age of 15 do not have their own income, although they work on a daily basis without pay. Their contribution to the care economy has been fundamental to the daily subsistence and productivity of rural households, without the economic retribution. The FAO also indicates that in addition, rural women in the region only have a fraction of the land, credit, productive inputs and education that men do.

The World's Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report for 2017<sup>1</sup> recognizes that the gaps between women and men on economic participation and political empowerment remain wide, with only 58% of the economic participation gap being closed, and estimates that at the current rate of progress, the overall global gender gap can be closed in 79 years in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Addressing these persistent gender gaps becomes imperative not only to be able to guarantee the full protection of women's human rights, but also to the economic and social development of our region. The Global Gender Gap Report for 2017 also underscores that a variety of models and empirical studies have suggested that improving gender parity may result in significant economic gains, and that fair returns to skills and the availability of deeper talent pools are disrupted by existing gender biases, with the greater losses on the benefits of diversity seen in the fields of care economy and the emerging technology sector.

Rural women's contributions to economic, environmental and social gains for sustainable development are of great importance for their societies and communities. However, they face enormous challenges in access to basic services, such as healthcare, education, credit, and other opportunities for personal and economic growth. In this regard, women's empowerment becomes crucial to their well-being and that of their communities, but also to the economic growth and productivity of their respective countries.

This underscores the importance to empower rural women and girls. Public policies and programs aimed at providing rural women and girls with access to education and specialized training need to be a priority for our region. In addition, public policies and programs also need to foster co-responsibility between women, men, the State and the private sector for social reproduction, including care. It is not enough to provide rural women and girls access to education and specialized training so they can be empowered and become part of the formal economy, with all its benefits, if the redistribution of traditional roles and responsibilities at home is not also addressed. As men become more involved in the care of the household and dependents, women have greater opportunities to increase their participation in the productive economy, increase their earnings and provide greater contributions to the household and the overall economy.

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<sup>1</sup> Gender Gap Report for 2017 (World Economic Forum):  
[http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2017.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf).

In addition to providing opportunities for rural women to participate in the formal economy, public policies also need to be implemented in the region to provide comprehensive support and social protection from a gender and rights perspective to women engaged in economic activities in the informal sector or for unpaid work at home or in their respective communities. The Americas still faces the challenge to incorporate a rights-based approach and economic, social and cultural rights, which are established in the region's legal framework, into its social protection systems through sound and committed public policy to facilitate the implementation of the existing legal framework.

In terms of women's political empowerment and leadership, women in the Americas face great obstacles to be able to exercise their leadership and political rights. This is exacerbated at the local level and in rural areas, where women's participation in politics is even more limited than at the national level. There also persist patriarchal cultural patterns that perpetuate discrimination and inequalities for women, especially rural, indigenous and afro-descendent women. Ultimately, women's political participation is imperative in order to be able to have inclusive democracies, with the capacity to represent a plurality of interests and demands. Overcoming the exclusion of women from political life and in particular positions of leadership, representation and policy-making is one of the crucial challenges facing both women's empowerment, and democratic systems in the Americas.

The importance of empowering women in the political sphere has been recognized by the region. The CIM is currently actively working in supporting the full exercise of women's political citizenship and parity in political representation as essential conditions for governance and a citizens' democracy in the countries of the Americas. In order to address this objective, the CIM is working on raising awareness of political leaders on the impacts of gender inequalities in the political sphere, women's political rights and gender parity, as well as increasing institutional capacity of political and electoral authorities in the region to mitigate political violence and harassment against women. As mentioned before, intersectionality needs to be taken into account as we advance the work towards women's full political participation. Working with rural, indigenous and afro-descendent women continues to be a priority of the CIM in its engagement to strengthen their political participation, leadership and empowerment.

In addition, one of the pillars of the Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean's (ECLAC) Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030<sup>2</sup> is "*Popular and citizen participation: democratization of policy and society*". This pillar refers to the contribution of women, in all their diversity, to the design, application and follow-up of policies at the national and international levels.

In the context of the CIM's work on the effective implementation of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence

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2 [https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/41013/S1700033\\_en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/41013/S1700033_en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y).

against Women (Belem do Pará Convention), the prevention and eradication of all forms of violence against women is being addressed. Through its follow-up mechanism (MESECVI), it analyzes progress in the implementation of the Convention by the States Party, as well as persistent challenges to an effective response to violence against women by the State.

The recently approved Third Hemispheric Report on the Implementation of the Belem do Para Convention<sup>3</sup> has included specific recommendations to the effect of taking into account the intersectionality of the different dimensions of discrimination, including rural women. Some of these recommendations (1) urge States to approve legislation and design and implement public policies aimed at preventing and eradicating conduct, cultural or discriminatory practices based on the subordination or inferiority of women and girls; (2) adapt state apparatus for more effective access to justice, so that the special needs and obstacles faced by groups of women and girls with greater vulnerability to violence are taken into account (including those women in rural zones, in situations of poverty and exclusion, language barriers, etc.); (3) and allocate significant budgets in order to carry out mass campaigns, actions and national programs for the prevention of violence against women, in accordance with full compliance of the obligation of due diligence to guarantee life free of violence. The MESECVI recognizes the importance of investing in the prevention of violence against women not only to ensure the exercise of their rights, but also to contribute to reducing the costs involved in the care and sanction of this type of violence (health, specialized services, courts, reparation of rights).

Referring to the International Day of Rural Women, one needs to recognize the important gaps that persist between women in rural and urban areas and to take all the necessary measures to eliminate them in the shortest time possible. This will be the only way to fully honor our commitment to equal rights and gender equality.

Through the Inter-American Democratic Charter, OAS Member States recognized that “democracy and social and economic development are interdependent and are mutually reinforcing.” They have also recognized that the elimination of all forms of discrimination and respect for diversity in the Americas contribute to strengthening democracy. The strength of our democratic institutions depends on the inclusion, diversity and plurality of the participation of its citizens. The value of the role rural women play in our societies, their contribution to the economy, their empowerment and leadership, the respect for their human rights, and their equal access to opportunities and services will only greater contribute to the consolidation of our democracies and democratic practices. Public policies enacted by the countries in the Americas need to address the persistent gaps, and provide the opportunities, services and access that rural women need to develop their full potential and to provide even greater contributions to our communities and societies in general.

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3 <http://www.oas.org/en/mesecvi/docs/TercerInformeHemisferico-EN.pdf>.



# Rural Women in the Caribbean: Key Agents of Transformation for Genuine and Sustainable Development

There is still an urgent need to work towards achieving gender equality and autonomy within the framework of sustainable development

*Mia A. Mottley\**

The story of Caribbean development cannot be told without the narrative of rural women. Throughout our evolution from plantation economies and agrarian societies to modern, independent nations, rural women have played and continue to play fundamental roles in the economic and social development of our countries, and indeed, in the very sustainability of the Region.

For centuries they have been responsible for producing, processing and marketing agricultural produce, and for the nutrition and well-being of their families and communities. As mothers, grandmothers, aunts and sisters, they have provided guidance and care on a daily basis for their families, as well as for the sick and the elderly in the community. Their use of natural herbs and traditional healing, combined with healthy lifestyles have been largely responsible for the record number of female centenarians in Barbados and Dominica.

The contribution of rural women to food and nutrition security and to the development of healthy societies, has been under-valued for far too long. Women now have an even greater role to play in leading the charge against the “tsunami” of Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases

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(CNCDs) currently affecting our Region, through the production, trade and promotion of locally grown foods that are healthy and nutritious. Moreover, their potential contribution to the development of the Health and Wellness sector, particularly in terms of niche tourism offerings, holds exciting possibilities for expansion of regional economies.

Their entrepreneurial spirit, born in many cases out of a sheer need for economic survival, has played a significant role not only in terms of the development of innovation and technology, but perhaps more importantly with respect to social and economic development through creating jobs and harnessing the productive capacity of other women, boosting per capita income growth, stabilising families, and reducing poverty.

In a region that is highly vulnerable to natural disasters and to the negative impacts of Climate Change, rural women have served as environmental stewards by protecting the rich biodiversity of our land, plant and animal species and marine resources, and engaging in what is now known as “Climate Smart Agriculture”. They are valuable repositories of traditional wisdom and knowledge for what is unique and authentic to our region, and represent the “intellectual property” that forms the basis for the innovative thinking required to transform our societies. Their potential contributions to the development of the “Blue” and “Green” bio-economies are enormous.

In addition to their productive and reproductive roles, rural women have evolved as community activists and leaders, rising from humble beginnings to top positions in public service at national, regional and international levels, raising the profile of gender and development in the arts and literature, politics, trade unionism and academia, advocating for the rights of women, positioning the region on global agenda issues through astute leadership, and charting development paths rooted in Caribbean culture, dignity and pride.

Despite these important advances made by women in several aspects of life across the Caribbean, there is still



*Women's economic empowerment also means having a voice, and strong business networks and representation in decision-making. The rigidities of some gender-blind policies, institutions, programmes and projects are perpetuated by the under-representation of women as policy makers, their limited participation in policy and institutional change processes and insufficient recognition of women's agencies and networks."*



important and urgent work to be done towards achieving gender equality and autonomy for women in the context of sustainable development. Women and girls are among the people most likely to be poor, to lack access to assets, education, health care and other essential services, and to be hit hardest by the impacts of global food and economic crises and climate change. Sexual harassment and gender-based violence are also very real and pressing issues for rural women.

Across the Region, women tend to be over-represented in the lowest sectors of the labour market – especially in the services sector – and under-represented in areas that require higher qualifications. Furthermore, the unemployment rate is higher among women, who also suffer lower levels of social protection and have lower salaries compared to men in similar positions. On almost every measure of development rural women, because of gender inequalities and discrimination, fare worse than rural men. Empowering them is therefore essential, not only for the well-being of individuals, families and rural communities, but also for overall economic productivity, and long-term sustainability of the Caribbean region.

Women entrepreneurs, particularly in rural areas, often experience difficulties accessing relevant financial products and services due to a lack of appropriate products, information, understanding of their needs and collateral. Business Development Services are not readily available in many rural areas and this affects the growth of rural women’s businesses. As a consequence, women are often left to rely on friends and family for finance, management capacity and other informal support for their businesses. Many women rely on personal funds for their investment needs.

Women’s economic empowerment also means having a voice, and strong business networks and representation in decision-making. The rigidities of some gender-blind policies, institutions, programmes and projects are perpetuated by the under-representation of women as policy makers, their limited participation in policy and institutional change processes and insufficient recognition of women’s agencies and networks.

The theme of International Women’s Day (IWD) 2018 “The Time is now: Rural and urban activists transforming women’s lives”, is reflective of the culmination to date of the sustained and significant efforts of several national, regional and international organisations that are working to address the challenges and to assist women in rightfully becoming the engines for transformational change.

This Paper focuses on the contributions of rural women to Food and Nutrition Security in the Caribbean, and describes how they are organising for success, embracing new technologies, becoming resilient in the face of Climate Change, and pioneering new ventures in community-based sustainable tourism. The Paper also gives some insights into the increasing participation of young women in the Agri-Food sector, and the positive signals that are on the horizon for a brighter future for our Region.

## **Women Food Producers**

In the Caribbean, rural women account for the greater proportion of the agricultural labour force and produce the majority of food grown, through both subsistence and commercial farming, and as part-time and full-time farmers. They are present in all aspects of Crop and Livestock Production, Fisheries, Aquaculture and Aquaponics; and in Apiculture.

In terms of marketing, rural women are responsible for moving tons of agricultural produce across the parishes and communities within our countries. From Coronation Market in Jamaica to Stabroek Market in Georgetown, women farmers, hucksters, higglers, and vendors supply our region with an array of food, servicing both local and tourist populations. Their labour and sacrifice have provided many of them with the income to provide access for their children and grandchildren to a good education, and a decent standard of living.

## ***Women in AgroProcessing***

Rural women have traditionally dominated the SME agro-processing sector, transforming fresh produce and livestock commodities into a multiplicity of products. Although there are thousands of MSMEs (Micro and Small and Medium Enterprises) and SMEs led by women in the Caribbean, very limited sex-disaggregated data exist on entrepreneurship in agriculture. There is a need to improve the collection and analysis of reliable data on rural women's enterprises to understand their needs and realities and inform policies, including generating better indicators, programme/project evaluations, lessons on what does or does not work and why, feedback mechanisms, and to identify where opportunities lie to scale up successes.

Training and skills upgrading are also needed to strengthen women entrepreneurs' business management, marketing and technical skills. Access to finance is one of the more critical constraints facing rural women. It is worth noting that traditional modalities such as "meeting turn" or "sousou" still represent valid and sustainable forms of financing for women in rural communities.

## ***Organising for Success***

Rural women and their organizations are on the move to claim their rights and improve their livelihoods and well-being. They are setting up successful businesses and acquiring new skills, pursuing their legal entitlements, shaping laws, policies and programmes on all issues that affect their lives, including improved food and nutrition security, and better rural livelihoods, using innovative agricultural methods and taking advantage of ICT, social media and new technologies.

The Caribbean Network of Rural Women Producers, CANROP, was established (as one of the constituent members of the regional Agricultural Alliance for Agriculture and the Rural Milieu) some 15 years ago to improve the standard of living of rural women producers through training, cultural exchange, networking and the promotion of regional and international trade.

The objectives of CANROP are:

- To provide a forum for the exchange of information, ideas and concerns affecting the development of businesses managed by rural women;
- To create a brand that identifies the goods and services of members with quality products produced by rural women;
- To pool resources for the marketing of products produced by members of the organization;
- To create training programs to maintain and develop the interpersonal, technical, financial and business skills of its members;
- To access external funding from national and multinational donor agencies to support national work programs; and
- To provide a forum that facilitates the discussion of gender equality and equity within the country, and across the Region.

### ***Women in Fisheries***

Compared to other areas of the world, the gender dynamics and gendered characteristics of Caribbean small-scale fisheries are poorly documented. Rural women work primarily in the processing of fish and seafood species. Thousands of rural women work in fish markets and fish processing plants across the region. There are also rural women groups involved in conservation efforts for sea turtle conservation.

### ***Rural women and Sustainable Tourism***

For many countries in the Region, tourism has become one of the most important industries, as persistent turbulence in other economic sectors has served to enhance the relative importance of tourism as an economic development strategy, making the industry increasingly crucial for the survival of local economies. There are several notable examples of rural women being involved in the development of sites, attractions and events in the rural sector.

## **Towards a more sustainable future**

The ageing of the agricultural sector in the Caribbean is cause for concern. In most cases, upwards of seventy percent of female farmers are 45 years and older. In response to this situation, there has been a concerted effort to interest youth in the business of agriculture by governments through their Ministries of Agriculture, Education, Labour and Youth and Departments of Justice, and by other technical assistance and donor agencies. Several young women are also now setting their sights on careers as chefs and culinary professionals.

### ***Rural Women Building Resilience through Climate Smart Agriculture***

Rural women are building resilience and practising Climate Smart Agriculture in many Caribbean countries, through the installation of photovoltaic systems, as well as water harvesting and distribution systems.

The economies of the colonial powers which ruled over the Caribbean owe much of their wealth to the work of farm labourers, largely represented by rural women. Since then, our economies have become less dependent on agriculture, and more on financial services and tourism, to the extent that the Caribbean region has been officially declared as “the most tourism-dependent region in the world”.

This distortion in the selection of economic drivers has brought about several negative impacts that must now be reversed if we are to have sustainable economies. We need to come “full circle” and make the Agri-Food sector the engine of growth for our economies once more. This transformation cannot take place without creating space for a conversation with rural women to ensure their full and effective participation in economic, social and political decision-making.

## The Vital Contribution of Rural Women

“I’ve spent a lot of time working in the countryside, so I know real women who are fighting for real things, things that actually affect everyone.”

*Vandana Shiva*

*Soledad Murillo de la Vega\**

There is no greater privilege than being invited to share one’s knowledge and experience, so allow me to begin by thanking the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) for offering me this opportunity. I have experience in two areas: firstly, as an academic who has overseen research projects on rural women and, secondly, as a former member of the CEDAW Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. States are required to appear before this body to respond to questions about their public policies with regard to equality.

One of the articles we used to ask States about was in relation to the rural woman (Article 14 of the Convention), so we could understand the various difficulties faced within the different territorial frameworks and, of course, each country’s policy response. CEDAW has a General Recommendation (No. 34/2016) on the Rights of Rural Women that it would be worth disseminating among the different legislatures, because it deals with a range of issues, such as education, employment, access to resources like justice and health and, of course, public policies designed to enable rural women to participate in decision-making.

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Courts and Equality,  
Spain

Through my work, I have had the opportunity to see things from both perspectives. For the four years that I was a member of the Committee, every State, without exception, was required to provide concrete data on the issue. Then I served as General Secretary for Equality Policies, between 2004 and 2008. During that time, the process of drafting the Law on Effective Equality between Women and Men (Ley Orgánica 3/2007) provided us with information about the challenges that still need to be tackled, which do not depend on major budgetary investment, but rather on strong political will to eradicate discrimination against women in the rural milieu.

1. **Rural women are informal workers, not landowners.** A common characteristic of rural women is that they work in farming and animal-rearing because of their husbands. Husbands are the ones who pay social security—where such systems are available—and take livestock to market, fix prices and conduct business transactions. One question worth asking is, “How many women are involved in farmers’ organizations?” Most rural women end up depending on their husband’s income, caught up in the informal economy created by the circumstances of their marriage, in which all goods and properties are in the husband’s name. Spain decided to correct this situation, and when the Equality Act was drafted it included an article that regulated women’s participation on the basis of shared ownership, thus freeing them from their onerous dependence on men and ensuring they would not be left completely unprotected in the event of divorce.
2. **Lack of access to resources.** Education is a right that enables women to learn about all their other rights; without it, they have no way of

knowing about the rights and guarantees to which they are entitled under a country’s legislation. In the past, only men had access to professional training on the subject, given the intensive nature of the work and long working days, without seasonal periods of rest. There are no incentives for young women to develop innovative ideas in the communities where they are born. The flow of rural dwellers to the city is due to the lack of services available. It has also been shown that the decision whether to stay in the countryside depends directly on women, that is, on the availability of health and education services, as well as



*The best way for women to engage with the various levels of government is in a group, not individually, because agriculture, by its very nature, tends to be carried out on farms, large and small, with no interconnection among the women involved unless they produce the same product or offer the same service. Rural women should join forces not only to sell their end products but also to address the issue of their shared living conditions, in order to achieve a better quality of life. There is an urgent need for rural women to unite for a common cause.”*

transportation that affords access to more sophisticated services, such as hospital complexes or the area's social services.

3. **The false idea that women are a group.** When designing public policies under a system of governance in which a government's actions are validated by means of citizen participation, the authorities often make the same mistake repeatedly: they consider women as a group with *special difficulties*. We are not a group. According to demographic data, women make up the majority of the population in every country in the world, with variations in those that have endured a serious conflict or have a displaced population. Governments need to understand that by failing to consider the contributions of rural women (in terms of ideas for improving their farm operations), they are simply continuing to adopt the negative approach instead of taking into account the statistical data—focusing on women's problems rather than on their contributions. Do governments facilitate denominations of origin for agricultural products? Or revive traditional art and craft forms that the new paradigm of sustainability designates as a new market niche? Who are the ones who get involved in these innovative forms of production most successfully? Rural women. This could lead to the development of specific professional branches of ecological agriculture.
4. **Participating in policy-making.** If governments fail to develop equality plans, rural women will not be able to participate in the design of policy strategies. But the policy world is based on a structure of loyalties and mutual support from which female rural workers are excluded because the heads of territorial divisions—mayors, governors, leaders—form part of an elite group comprised, almost exclusively, of men.
5. **Failure to work together for progress.** The best way for women to engage with the various levels of government is in a group, not individually, because agriculture, by its very nature, tends to be carried out on farms, large and small, with no interconnection among the women involved unless they produce the same product or offer the same service. Rural women should join forces not only to sell their end products, but also to address the issue of their shared living conditions, in order to achieve a better quality of life. There is an urgent need for rural women to unite for a common cause.

But it is even more urgent that the branches of government include rural areas in their policy agenda—areas that are increasingly exposed to a globalized market, in which human rights are at risk of becoming an item of expenditure rather than a government's democratic indicator.





# Rural Women in the Northern Triangle of Central America Play a Key Role in the Food and Nutritional Security of Their Families

A closer look at the capacity for resilience in food and nutritional security of female-headed rural households

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In rural areas, single-parent homes headed by women are the result of various circumstances that cause families to break apart, such as migration, violence, gender and socioeconomic inequity, as well as family and social conflicts. These homes face a complex reality that increases their economic and social vulnerability, making it more difficult to participate in sources of employment or to benefit from some of the social policies that guarantee a stable and sustainable status of food and nutritional security.

A study on the capacity for resilience in food and nutritional security of rural households in the Central America's Northern Triangle<sup>1</sup> was carried out through the Information Systems Program for Resilience in Food and Nutritional Security in the Region of the Central American Integration System (PROGRESAN-SICA).

The study estimates the Resilience Capacity Index for single-parent households headed by women as well as

1 Sibrian, R. and Patricia Palma. *Una aproximación de la capacidad de resiliencia de la seguridad alimentaria y nutricional en hogares liderados por mujeres en el área rural de países del triángulo norte de Centroamérica*. PROGRESAN-SICA. July 2018.

traditional households, based on four pillars: **assets, access to basic services, adaptability, and social protection networks**. The Resilience Index Measurement and Analysis (RIMA-II) methodology, promoted by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), was applied in order to conduct the analysis.

According to the results, one out of every three homes in El Salvador, and about one out of every five in Guatemala and Honduras, is a single-parent, female-headed household.

In Guatemala and Honduras, single-parent households headed by women have a greater capacity for Resilience in Food and Nutritional Security (FNS) than traditional households, which is not the case in El Salvador.

The main findings of the study are summarized below:

- One out of every three homes in El Salvador, and close to one out of every five in Guatemala and Honduras, is a single-parent, female-headed household.
- In rural areas of Guatemala and Honduras, single-parent households headed by women have a greater capacity for Resilience in Food and Nutritional Security than traditional households. In El Salvador, the opposite is true.
- Boosting the adaptability and access to social protection networks of single-parent households is necessary in order to increase Resilience in FNS.



*The fact that households are more resilient as a result of strategies developed and implemented by women heads of households is noteworthy, especially given the conditions and struggles that hinder women's ability to participate fully in their social and economic context, including their work, family and domestic responsibilities, as well as their constant struggle to take full advantage of their right to a level playing field. It is therefore necessary to develop public policies geared toward women, especially heads of households, to guarantee long-term effects on human capital."*

### **Impact of the capacity for Resilience in FNS and public policymaking to support its development and stability**

Limited capacity for Resilience in FNS primarily affects vulnerable households, which are exposed to negative situations that prevent them from acquiring sustainable livelihoods, accessing services required for development, and gaining protection from existing private and public networks. This situation is manifested by food and nutritional insecurity, which is measured by food consumption indicators that

reflect the essential nutrients required for the adequate physical development of each family member.

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It is therefore necessary to develop public policies geared toward women, especially heads of households, to guarantee long-term effects on human capital.

These actions should strengthen the capacity for Resilience in FNS, by driving employment as well as promoting programs that improve access to paid work, reconcile work and family responsibilities, and work to reduce poverty based on the unique structure and characteristics of female-headed families.

In the short term, it is important to develop public policies to generate investments that can assist in reversing the negative effects of each of the aforementioned pillars, which influence the capacity for Resilience in FNS of female-headed households. Strengthening government-led social protection networks is especially important in Guatemala.

All three countries should develop programs that improve access to basic services; social investment programs that include actions aimed at generating income and boosting the positive effects of adaptability in households, through the participation of women heads of households; and actions aimed at generating information to monitor the capacity for Resilience in FNS through national household surveys.



# Territorial Development: Brighter Prospects for Rural Women

The rural woman, and more so, the indigenous rural woman, epitomizes poverty in Latin America

*Susana Pinilla\**

I ncreasing urbanization and population concentration in the region's cities has caused Latin America's (L.A.) rural areas to be overlooked and neglected. Second to North America, Latin America is the region with the largest concentration of people in urban areas, where 75% of the total population is located<sup>1</sup>.

Without diminishing the importance of Latin America's vibrant cities, we should also re-establish the strategic value of rural areas as hubs of economic and social growth, by driving production transformation, competitiveness and social and territorial inclusion for sustainable development.

A quarter of Latin America's Economically Active Population (EAP) and 21% of its overall population (129 million people in 2015) in 33 countries live in rural areas, areas that produce the region's food and protect the environment, thereby ensuring the sustainability of the planet. Their vast fertile plains, abundant sunshine and water resources (33% of the planet's); the world's largest

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1 Daude, C., Fajardo, G., Brassiolo, P., Estrada, R., Goytia, C., Sanguinetti, P., ... Vargas, J. (2017). RED 2017. Crecimiento urbano y acceso a oportunidades: un desafío para América Latina. Bogotá: CAF. Available at: <http://scioteca.caf.com/handle/123456789/1091>

tropical forest - the Amazon - which is considered to be a natural defense against climate change; marine areas with highly sought-after species and a wide array of mineral resources are just a few examples of why Latin America is considered to be the most resource-rich developing region in the world<sup>2</sup>.

By 2050, the world's population will have reached 10 billion, and there will be a great demand for food to satisfy its needs. L.A. should prepare itself to become a strategic supplier by instituting better environmental practices, guaranteeing food security and the transfer of knowledge to its people<sup>3</sup>. Latin America's rural areas have immense production and wealth generation potential, which should be exploited by transforming regional production, generating value added and creating higher-paying jobs to achieve greater inclusion and improved living conditions. Rural women will be essential if the region is to make the most of these opportunities.

There are 58 million Latin American rural women (48% of the rural population) and close to 20% of them are indigenous people<sup>4</sup>, who like their male counterparts, work primarily in agriculture. Rural employment, in absolute terms, has steadily increased in recent decades, despite the fact that, in relative terms, it has decreased, in comparison to the growth in urban areas. The relative weight of agricultural employment has also been declining<sup>5</sup>.



*The rural woman, and more so, the indigenous rural woman, epitomizes poverty in Latin America. Therefore, for genuine sustainable development to become a reality, it is imperative that actions seek to improve the living conditions of women and enhance their technical and productive development, thereby enabling them to progress as individuals, as the nucleus of the rural family and as major contributors to the economy and to the community."*

The increase in rural areas has been mainly due to the rise in female employment, whose average regional employment rate climbed from 32.4% in 1990 to 47.5% in 2010. The labor participation of rural women has grown by 45% over the last 20 years. However, this increase still lags far behind that of the men, which was 85.1% in 2010<sup>6</sup>.

The increasing number of women employed in agriculture results, for the most part, from the integration of regional

2 CAF. (2010). *Visión para América Latina 2040. Hacia una sociedad más incluyente y próspera*. Caracas: CAF. Available at: <http://scioteca.caf.com/handle/123456789/496>

3 Emerging Markets Forum. (2016). *The World in 2050: striving for a more just, prosperous and harmonious global community*. Washington D.C. HARINDER S. KOHLI. Spanish version available at: <http://scioteca.caf.com/handle/123456789/904>

4 Nobre, M; Hora, K; Brito, C; Parada, S. 2017. *Atlas de las Mujeres Rurales de América Latina y El Caribe: "Al tiempo de la vida y los hechos"*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Santiago de Chile. 82 p.

5 ILO (International Labor Organization). 2012. *Panorama Laboral América Latina y el Caribe*. Lima, Peru. 112 p.

6 ILO. 2012. *Id.*

agriculture into the global economy, which has given many women the chance to earn their own income for the first time and therefore to be financially independent.

L.A. women engage in a wide range of activities - agricultural, non-agricultural and own-account -, which traditional statistical instruments recognize as domestic, rather than production endeavors, thus underestimating the extent of women's contribution to production and the labor market<sup>7</sup>. For example, whereas the labor participation rate of women in agriculture in Bolivia, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador and Uruguay is high (more than 50%), in countries like Chile, Cuba and Venezuela, it is very low (between 20% and 30%). These are countries in which adult women are the ones who perform these duties, or in the case of Bolivia and Guatemala, are countries in which female child labor is more common, as is the involvement of women older than 60 years<sup>8</sup>.

The region also has a large indigenous presence. In Panama alone, a country with 4,054,000 inhabitants, women make up 49.9% of the population, with a femininity index of 99. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the total population reside in urban areas, 51% of them being women and 49% men. Thirty-three percent (33%) of the population are rural dwellers, 48% of which are women and 52% men<sup>9</sup>.

Panama's population is 12.3% indigenous (417,559 people), with a 50.9% to 49.1% ratio of men to women. Approximately 195,285 indigenous people live in the *comarcas* (autonomous indigenous regions) and the remaining 222,274 live elsewhere. Panama has eight ethnic groups - the Kuna, Ngäbe, Buglé, Emberá, Wounaan, Bokota, Teribe/Naso and Bri Bri peoples -, who reside both within and outside of five legally established *comarcas*, three at the provincial level (Kuna Yala, Emberá-Wounaan and Ngäbe-Buglé) and two at the municipal level (Kuna Wargandí y Kuna Madungandí).

United Nations (UN) data confirms that Panama is the world's fastest growing economy, boasting sustained economic growth over the last decade (human development index of 0.765 over 1) - the 65<sup>th</sup> highest of 187 countries worldwide. Yet, it shows that inequality remains a prevalent issue (where the country's ranking drops to 83<sup>rd</sup> position), more so when inequality data is disaggregated by gender, placing it in 107<sup>th</sup> position.

This inequality is concentrated in rural areas and mainly affects women, young people, and most of all, the indigenous population. Despite efforts to ensure equal opportunities for women, the disparities are still evident: an EAP of 49% versus 79.7% for men and a 5.3% female unemployment rate versus 3.3% for males, with the gap widening further in the 15 - 24 age bracket. Again, 39.6% of rural women do not have their own resources compared to 14% of men. In urban areas, the percentages are 28.1% and 5.8%, respectively.

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7 ILO. 2012. *Id.*

8 ILO. 2012. *Id.*

9 ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. 2015. CEPALSTAT.

While access to basic rights has improved in some measure, the work is far from over. Throughout the years, illiteracy has been declining. However, in the *comarcas*, the rates are high: 30.8% in Ngäbe-Buglé, 28.3% in Kuna Yala, and 22.9% in Emberá. The incidence of chronic malnutrition in children under five is estimated to be 62% in the *comarcas*, in contrast to the 17.7% figure reported for the rest of the country. Indigenous women have an overall fertility rate of 6.4 children per woman. The rate is lower (4.6 children) for indigenous women living outside of these communities, who have greater access to health services, employment opportunities, education and other benefits<sup>10</sup>.

The infant mortality rate in these communities is 54.5 deaths per one thousand live births. Elsewhere, the figure is lower and is estimated at 33.2%<sup>11</sup>.

Notwithstanding the distinctive features of each country, the common denominators in the profile of Latin American rural women working in agriculture are as follows<sup>12</sup>:

- They are mostly adults, with some level of participation by girls under 15 years of age.
- Have low levels of education, with the majority completing between 0 to 5 years of schooling, which is less than female workers in urban areas and rural men.
- High illiteracy rates, especially among adult women in rural areas. According to ECLAC / FAO data, the highest illiteracy rates have been observed in El Salvador (37.5%), Bolivia (45.8%), Guatemala (60.7%) and Peru (65.9%).
- They mainly undertake agricultural activities, but are often overworked, due to a sexual division of labor in which they balance activities for production and family consumption with care for children, the elderly and ailing family and community members.
- Earn limited or no income for strenuous labor, working as unpaid family members in agriculture or in the family's self-feeding activities, in addition to their unpaid domestic activities, and therefore are dependent on men.
- Find wage employment mainly through temporary jobs, which offer limited social protection coverage and which create economic insecurity.
- Have limited access to land ownership and the management of inputs, to technology or to technological expertise.

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10 INEC (National Statistics and Census Institute). 2010 Population Census. Panama.

11 INEC. 2010. *Id.*

12 Nobre. *Loc. cit.*



- Suffer from a persistent income gap.
- Face double discrimination, first for being women and then for being indigenous. Receive limited recognition for their labor in reproduction-, production- and family consumption-related activities.

### **Sustainable and Integrated Territorial Development and the Master Plan for the Agriculture Sector of the Western Region (PMARO): providing opportunities for rural women**

In keeping with the Government of Panama's 2014 – 2019 Strategic Plan, “One Country”, CAF has developed a strategy for sustainable and integrated territorial development that promotes the generation of value added to drive productivity, technological development, employment, income and competitiveness in Panama.

Having undertaken working visits to various regions and assessing their potential, the Western Region – encompassing the provinces of Chiriquí, Bocas del Toro and the Ngäbe-Buglé *Comarca* -, was identified as a priority area to launch an unprecedented regional joint public-private sector initiative to boost sustainable development and regional competitiveness. This led to the formation of the Center for Competitiveness of Panama's Western Region (CECOMRO), which is a forum managed by local associations with the support of CAF, for the purpose of strengthening business institutions. The initiative has met with remarkable success during its short existence and this is a model worth replicating.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Agricultural Development (MIDA) and CECOMRO, and at their request, CAF funded a diagnostic study and the development of a roadmap to reposition agricultural activity in this region, with the technical support of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), bearing in mind that agricultural activity is the engine of production and of the local economy.

The solid technical foundation of IICA's study, in addition to CECOMRO's keen interest in repositioning the agriculture sector and the steadfast support of MIDA and of Juan Carlos Varela, President of the Republic, gave rise to the development of the Master Plan for the Agriculture Sector of the Western Region (PMARO). In order to execute the plan, MIDA has injected US \$155 million of government funds into the project, through a loan from CAF, and US \$27.6 million has been earmarked for the first phase. IICA will continue to provide technical support and CECOMRO has committed to investing US \$402 million over a seven-year period.

The region is the major producer of food in the country and PMARO has prioritized the agricultural chains that offer the most promise: cocoa, coffee, meat, dairy, plantain and vegetables. The Plan is predicated on an intense investment program for the application of agricultural best practices, building the technological capacity of producers and reducing trade gaps by offering a competitive supply of commodities in the volumes required by national and international markets. Fifteen thousand organized producers will benefit directly and the plan stands

to have a significant impact on the region. It is estimated that of the 65,000 individuals working in agriculture (including landowners and workers), 53,000 (81%) will be affected by the PMARO program, including those who will benefit from the creation of more than 10,000 thousand new quality jobs in primary agricultural production.

The Plan seeks to address the major weaknesses that have been identified, such as the wide geographic dispersion of producers and their weak linkages; low productivity; limited negotiating skills; poor organization of supplies; the absence of quality standardization; high levels of waste in local wholesale networks; low prices paid to the producer and inconsistencies in quality.

PMARO provides an opportunity to reduce gender gaps in Panama's agriculture sector. Consequently, MIDA, CAF and CECOMRO have incorporated gender into the project, establishing Social, Ethnic and Gender Equality as "Principles and Guidelines" of PMARO, recognizing, respecting and providing equal treatment to all ethnic groups and their members – both male and female – living within the area of intervention.

Moreover, the program has been structured to ensure that equivalent goods and services are provided to both men and women, to develop their potential, capacity, skills and their intellectual, physical and emotional abilities, while offering them comparable social, economic, political and cultural opportunities. It facilitates the just and equitable participation of women in each of the seven programs, affording them a level of participation, in keeping with the provisions of Panamanian law. It offers the rural female producer access to technical training, inputs, equipment, technology and fair wages, to improve living conditions for herself and her family and to boost her self-esteem and personal and productive development, thereby contributing to improving agricultural productivity in the region.

One of the first steps will be to train employees involved in implementing the Plan in issues related to the gender perspective and its application, as well as to promote a gender balance in technical staff. PMARO will utilize extension activities and technology transfer as key tools to foster the inclusion of women.

Strengthening networking and entrepreneurship among women will reduce their isolation and prompt them to join associations that have developed business plans to access inputs, tools and technology, allowing members to increase their assets and production output and those of the association. They are encouraged to participate in decision-making, including in defining agendas, and in issues related to the formalizing of property ownership, access to financing, *inter alia*.

Women's role in water management is being promoted, through the provision of specialized training in water source management through the transfer of technical knowledge about irrigation and water harvesting.

The demand for labor, in the short-term, offers an opportunity to increase the

inclusion of women in the workforce, promoting equal wages and emphasizing their value to production and social development by demonstrating that when women earn, more is invested in improvements for the family, particularly for children – in health, education and nutrition -, which strengthens the local human capital.

### **Proposed improvement measures**

In order to highlight the value of rural areas to Latin America, create wealth and improve the living conditions of a quarter of its population, we recommend the following:

- Promote government policies and actions to increase awareness of the potential of national sub-regions: identifying any resources that they have and that may be exploited for production purposes and driving the creation of value added to generate employment and higher wages for the most disadvantaged rural communities.
- Facilitate “State and Market” support. State - by fostering public investments in connectivity infrastructure (highways, ports, airports, railways, telecommunications) and basic services (drinking water and sanitation, health, electricity, education) and Market - by attracting national and international private investment in potential areas that have been identified for entrepreneurial and local business development.
- Drive private and public investment in modernization and the infusion of technology into agricultural activities, through the use of environmental practices that boost productivity and agro exports.

The rural woman, and more so, the indigenous rural woman, epitomizes poverty in Latin America. Therefore, for genuine sustainable development to become a reality, it is imperative that actions seek to improve the living conditions of women and to enhance their technical and productive development, thereby enabling them to progress as individuals, as the nucleus of the rural family and as major contributors to the economy and to the community. This calls for:

- The eradication of illiteracy and increased levels of schooling and education through creative public and private initiatives, emphasizing practical, technical, and production knowledge that will yield benefits, in the short-term.
- The eradication of child and maternal malnutrition, through the delivery of health and nutrition services to guarantee healthy and productive future generations.
- The education of women and men about nutritional, sexual and

reproduction issues.

- The introduction or expansion of the supply of basic services for drinking water, sanitation, schools and nurseries that will help to reduce women's share of the domestic workload.
- Communication and public awareness campaigns in schools, homes, community centers, churches and municipalities to promote a culture of equal opportunities for men and women in domestic activities, at school and at work.
- The incorporation of women and their entrepreneurial initiatives into agricultural value chains, by providing the requisite technical and financial assistance to guarantee the sustainability of these businesses within the chains.
- The creation of entrepreneurial associations of rural women to improve their access to markets and to satisfy the demand.
- A review of the legal frameworks that impede women's access to land ownership and the elimination of any gender bias in agricultural transformation policies that exclude women as direct beneficiaries.
- Strengthening of the leadership, negotiation and conflict resolution skills of rural women, as a means of building community empowerment.”

Exploiting the wealth of the region's rural areas and promoting the development of its communities will lead to greater territorial, economic and social inclusion, to counterbalance urban development in our countries.

Greater participation by rural women in the economy and in the society and more involvement by men in family and domestic duties will result in more developed and productive societies.

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# From Knowledge to Action: Supporting Women in Agriculture in Latin America

Understanding different women's needs in agriculture is important to creating successful sustainable development initiatives

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There is a large body of literature that describes women's important roles in agriculture at the household, community, national and international levels. Women participate in all stages of food production, from harvesting to sale; they are seed savers and storytellers, thus supporting community food security over time. Women migrate to agricultural areas to work seasonally on farms, within and outside of their home communities, further contributing to food destined for national and international markets.

Despite the clear importance of women in agriculture and food security, three outstanding issues remain. First, many women's knowledge and skills remain underreported and underrepresented. Second, women's unique needs and challenges are not always adequately considered in agricultural research and interventions. Third, despite having knowledge that we need to better support women's development goals, many programs lack clear roadmaps for action.

The goal of this article is to contribute to the above three issues by: 1) representing women's knowledge and skills, 2) discussing women's unique challenges, and

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3) providing directives to better support women in agricultural interventions. This article is organized as follows: In the first and second sections, we review women, food security, and agriculture with a focus on their knowledge, skills, and unique challenges; we draw on cases and examples from Latin America as well as researcher experiences in Costa Rica. In the third section of this article, we provide a roadmap to better support women in this field.

## I. Women and agriculture in Latin America

**Seed saving & home gardens.** The practices of seed saving and maintaining home gardens continue to be integral to preserving agrobiodiversity, cultural value, and food security (Galluzzi *et al.* 2010, Phillips 2013). Historically, household responsibilities, including maintaining the land that is around the home, belong to women. Therefore, women are often the savers of seeds and the primary keepers and caretakers of home gardens. Across 39 case studies in Latin America, Howard (2006) found that women most commonly manage these gardens. In San Ignacio, located in northwestern Mexico, Buechler (2016) documented that many women contribute to the household economy through their home gardens and utilize their unique knowledge set to develop adaptation strategies needed to maintain production. Researcher Mariana Rodriguez shared that Bribri women in Yorkin, Costa Rica are constantly exchanging seeds and food with their neighbors, how women, in contrast to men, tend to keep several edible plants and animals in their farms and how many men are focused mainly on growing commercial crops (*personal communication*).

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*Understanding different women's needs in agriculture is important to creating successful sustainable development initiatives. As Doss et al. (2018) assert, "simply having data on women's labor in agriculture does not tell us how to increase food security or strengthen rural livelihoods (p. 71)": We need to work with men and women to understand their unique challenges as well as what they need to overcome them. One key area for dialogue is women's triple burdens. A triple burden is a person's triple workload in the areas of 1) work outside the home or agricultural labour, 2) household maintenance, and 3) childcare."*

**Climate adaptation.** The drastic impacts of climate change on agriculture have required many farming communities to adapt to achieve food and economic security. These strategies have relied heavily on the distinct knowledge and experiences of women, who have provided unique and innovative adaptation strategies. In northern Guanajuato, Mexico, Bee (2014) described how women use climate-resilient crops to confront climate challenges and how they transmit this knowledge to their daughters. Furthermore, two organized groups of rural women in Chiapas, Mexico used knowledge exchanges to share their know-how regarding increasing agrobiodiversity to



adapt to a changing climate (Lookabaugh 2017). In rural Quechua communities of the Peruvian Andes, women play a critical role in the cultivation of a diversity of potatoes for climate adaptation (Walshe & Argumedo 2016).

***Migrant workers.*** Throughout Latin America, many agricultural sectors rely heavily on the work carried out by migrant women. Lee (2010) recounted the experiences of Nicaraguan migrant women working in Costa Rica's agriculture sector, primarily in the cassava and pineapple industries. Due to the undocumented status of many, the only work available in agriculture for these women is that left unwanted by citizens or documented migrants who have access to better paying and less intensive work. The significant contributions to global food security made by migrant women are often coupled with the injustices they face due to their legal status and/or gender. In Mexico, Fleury (2016) highlighted the trend that exists of listing migrant women as agricultural helpers to their male counterparts, resulting in lower pay, even though the work is often the same as men's.

***Food justice leadership.*** Women lead peasant unions, co-operatives, and food justice advocacy groups all over Latin America. Women's cooperatives advocate for agroecology, agriculture that supports diversification, family nutrition, and social and environmental well-being (e.g., Calmañana in Uruguay; Oliver 2016). Strong female leadership within La Vía Campesina, a transnational peasant movement, has been important to create programs and policies that support food sovereignty, from the local level up to the level of the United Nations (Desmarais 2003). In Brazil, women have led a key environmental, human rights, and food justice movement called Marcha das Margaritas; through their marches, they have achieved important gains regarding: women's participation in agriculture reform, labor rights, and violence against women (Marcha das Margartias 2018).

***Women and men's cooperation, changing roles, and differences among women.*** The above review, with select examples from Latin America, illustrates that women have central roles in sustainable agriculture, food security, and food justice. While highlighting these roles is important, we need to exercise caution in our analyses to avoid overgeneralization. Women and men often work together in agriculture and their roles can be dynamic depending upon the context. For example, Indigenous Bribri farmers in Costa Rica often work in gender mixed groups in home gardens and agricultural fields (e.g., Sylvester et al. 2016). Mixed gender groups also manage home gardens in Oaxaca, Mexico (e.g., Aguilar-Støen et al. 2009). Furthermore, gendered roles can change over time and can be context specific. Male out-migration, in Guatemala for instance, has increased some rural women's roles in commercial agriculture (World Bank 2015), a phenomenon termed the feminization of farming (De Schutter 2013). Understanding women's dynamic roles is increasingly important as global pressure on agriculture is changing, particularly in countries with a growing middle class (Delgado 2003). Lastly, women are not a homogenous group; their roles in agrobiodiversity conservation, home gardens, climate adaptation, commercial agriculture and food justice will depend on individual differences (e.g., life-stage, nationality, ethnicity, and individual histories, affinities, and opportunities).

## II. Women's unique challenges

Understanding different women's needs in agriculture is important to creating successful, sustainable development initiatives. As Doss *et al.* (2018) assert, "simply having data on women's labor in agriculture does not tell us how to increase food security or strengthen rural livelihoods (p. 71)". We need to work with men and women to understand their unique challenges as well as what they need to overcome them.

One key area for dialogue is women's triple burdens. A triple burden is a person's triple workload in the areas of 1) work outside the home or agricultural labour, 2) household maintenance, and 3) childcare. Researcher Clara Ramin shared with us a day in the life of a female farmer in the Longo Maï community, Costa Rica. Many female farmers start their day often very early, at four a.m., prepare the house and the food in the pre-harvest stage of agriculture, and do not rest after working in agriculture fields due to their household maintenance and/or child care activities (*personal communication*). What Clara describes is not unique to Longo Maï. Sylvester and García (2018) describe similar daily tasks that occupy women's time in the Talamanca Bribri Territory, Costa Rica, where women wake up at three a.m. to start the fire and prepare for agricultural work. They work in fields in the morning, return to cook for lunch, and then spend the afternoons working on other tasks such as drying seeds and grinding corn, cacao, or coffee. Below we discuss directives for action to minimize the burden on women with agriculture interventions, as well as how to better support women's development aspirations and needs.

## III. Directives for action to better support women in agriculture

- 1) ***Understand agriculture as a multi-stage process.*** Conceptualizing agriculture as a multi-stage process is central to accurately representing women's knowledge, skills, leadership, and challenges. Although there is a growing body of literature describing the gender dimensions at different stages of agriculture, the main emphasis has been placed on the field work and food harvesting stages. Sylvester *et al.* (2016) describe how Bribri Indigenous agriculture starts at a pre-harvest stage, i.e., where women and men prepare for the day in the field through activities such as cooking as well as preparing machetes and tools - this is a mixed gender activity. Similarly, agriculture does not stop after field tasks are completed; rather, women are involved in many food processing activities after work in the fields such as food processing and preparation before consumption or sale. Thus, to ensure we understand men and women's full contribution to agriculture and food security, analyses should examine the full suite of activities that make agriculture possible. These activities include: pre-harvest preparation, field preparation, planting, tending to agricultural fields, cleaning fields, harvesting, processing, preparation, marketing, sharing, and sales.
- 2) ***Practice gender- and culturally-sensitive methodologies.*** Practicing a gender-sensitive methodology means being sensitive to the different social

and economic realities of men and women, and adjusting ones program accordingly. To understand these realities, we need to have conversations with the farmers and participate in their daily routines. While working with Bribri women in Costa Rica, primary author Sylvester uncovered that past research and interventions were extractive and increased women's work burdens. During interventions, women have had to cook for outsiders, wash their clothing, attend to their questions, and guide them in community customs. Furthermore, women explained that outsiders rarely follow local schedules; this means women have to wait around the house for outsiders to wake up, around seven or eight in the morning, to prepare their food and guide them in their work. That outsiders do not understand women's schedules can be a significant setback because women wake up at around three in the morning and are out of the house working in their fields by six a.m. Thus, not only have outsiders increased women's work burdens, they have also negatively affected their wage labour. One idea to solve this problem was presented by Sylvester's Bribri colleagues who suggested that, during research, she help with daily workloads (e.g., working in agriculture fields, processing food, washing). Working with women in their daily tasks freed up their time to complete interviews and/or allowed Sylvester to complete interviews while doing daily work (Sylvester & García 2018).

- 3) **Work with women to understand their differences.** Without an analysis of how women's and men's situations differ, we run the risk of simplifying the dynamics of our agriculture and food systems. By recognizing the variability of women, we can identify the specific factors that promote (or hinder) land tenure, access to resources, and other factors that strengthen food security (Doss *et al.* 2018). Understanding site specific factors will help us better direct our development initiatives.
- 4) **Document cooperation among men and women.** Many agricultural tasks are collaborations from members of both genders, and such a fine-grained analysis is key to accurately representing men and women (Sylvester *et al.* 2016). Although home gardens are reported to be commonly managed by women in Latin America (Howard 2006), some cases show these are gender mixed spaces (e.g., Aguilar-Støen *et al.*, 2009). Without a complete picture of cooperation among men and women we may experience unintended outcomes of interventions. First, we may misrepresent key knowledges of women and men (e.g., men as home gardeners or women as migrant laborers). Second, if we only document gendered differences, we may create broad generalizations of women as sole leaders in agrobiodiversity conservation or climate adaptive practices. Such simplifications has resulted in targetting women only for sustainable agriculture or climate resilient initiatives – this practice can subsequently increase their already heavy workloads (Doss *et al.* 2018).
- 5) **Work with men.** Women's issues do not exist in a vacuum; they are linked to the wider power networks within households, communities, and societies that involve men. Thus, better supporting women means working with men.

Scholars in the wider field of gender and development have documented how working with men can greatly benefit gender equality goals (e.g. Sweetman 2013). Increased cross-fertilization with the field of development can help provide agriculture scholars and professionals with roadmaps to working with men. Sweetman (2013) suggests three key areas to address some of the wider drivers of inequality: 1) working on violent masculinities as part of women's empowerment projects, 2) supporting men to be responsible husbands and fathers, and 3) working with adolescents. These three areas should be valued as equal priorities in agricultural outreach work, i.e., supporting women's access to agrobiodiversity, climate-resilient crops, education, technology, and land.

- 6) **Support women's rights.** Many migrant agricultural workers in Latin America have undocumented status; this means women can be forced to take jobs that are unwanted by citizens or documented migrants and these undocumented women may not be fairly compensated for their work. Women can be listed as helpers to male counterparts and thus earn less money, even when their agriculture work is the same as men's (Fleury 2016). In these cases, it is essential that researchers and practitioners work on data gathering and/or interventions that highlight areas where women's human rights are not yet upheld. A series of human rights conventions are directly relevant to women's work in agriculture, including: 1) The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW 1979), and 2) The Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW 1990; UN Women 2015).

## Conclusion

Women are central to agriculture, food security, and social justice in Latin America. We reviewed some of their many roles in seed saving, home gardens, climate adaptation, commercial agriculture, and environmental leadership. We highlight the triple burden as one of the unique challenges experienced by women in agriculture. Lastly, we outline six directives for action to: 1) better support women in agriculture, 2) work towards Agenda 2030's goal of leaving no one behind, and 3) ensure projects directed for women reduce, rather than reinforce, existing inequalities.

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# Towards Gender Equality, a Challenge that Brings Us Together

The plight of rural women  
in Argentina exposes our  
historical debts

*Carolina Stanley\**

For many decades, women have fought for equal participation in society, on par with men; this struggle has now gained remarkable momentum, with unprecedented power and presence throughout the world. In Argentina, we are experiencing a historical moment, in which the struggle for equal rights for women has become one of the main topics on the political and especially the social agenda. Whereas before this was a topic only addressed by experts, it has currently become part of daily conversations and discussions, at the family table, in schools, cities and rural environments. Addressing gender is now much more than speaking about violence; it is now a matter of human rights.

We know full well that any prosperous country requires an egalitarian society. In the words of Kofi Annan, *“gender equality is much more than just an end in itself, but a prerequisite to face the challenges of poverty reduction, promotion of sustainable development and the development of solid governance”*.

\* Minister of Social  
Development,  
Argentine Republic

Within this process of social and cultural transformation, the State plays a key role not only in the articulation of new social demands but also as an active promoter of public

policies that guarantee that all people, regardless of their gender, can access the same rights and be free to fully exercise their autonomy.

The fact that we are currently discussing historical social issues strengthens our democracy and our institutions. Since the beginning of his tenure, the President has taken on the role of leader and promoter of gender equality. The State and the entire society alike have the responsibility to reflect upon the issue and generate changes that will contribute to bridging historical inequality gaps, ensuring a truly egalitarian country where every individual can enjoy freedom of choice.

In Argentina, half of the population are women and 40% of them are heads of household. 1,772,107 women live in rural environments; however, gender inequality becomes evident at many different levels:

- **Unpaid work is almost exclusively a woman's task:** Women dedicate almost twice as many hours as men to household chores and caring for others.
- **At work, women are not given the same opportunities as men:** Women get paid 23.5% less than men for doing the same job. Men occupy 68.8% of managerial positions in the private sector, whereas women only 31.2%.
- **Women's physical integrity is not guaranteed.** During 2017, 251 women were murdered due to their gender, and between 2008 and 2017, 3,378 boys and girls were left without their mother, of this number, 2,161 (more than 66%) are under the age of 18.
- **Decision-making environments are mostly male-dominated:** Out of 24 governors, 4 are women; 1 out of 5 justices in the Supreme Court is a woman; 9.4% of mayors are women; 37.5% of Argentine senators are women; and 35.6% of the seats in the Lower House are occupied by women.

Current problems faced by rural women reveal the historical debts of the government, civil society and the business sector, not only in terms of financial autonomy but also in helping these women overcome poverty, deal with unpaid work and care, unequal pay, discrimination in the workplace and insufficient social protection.

Rural women make the multiple dimensions of gender inequality visible. Although they account for a third of the world population and are responsible for half of the world's food production, they were invisible for many years from the public policy perspective.

With respect to **economic equality**, rural women have less access to productive resources and means of production than their male peers. They are also more exposed to poverty and isolation than urban women, due to their decreased access to social and cultural services and to proper infrastructure.



Furthermore, as in the cities, rural women are responsible for **unpaid work**, which usually goes unnoticed. Domestic chores in the countryside require more time and effort, as they involve harder, more complex tasks than in the city. If we consider **gender equality from the perspective of decision-making and citizenship participation**, rural women find it much more challenging to be a part of public decision-making, and therefore voice their opinions in these settings.

Finally, like urban women, rural women are deeply affected by **gender violence**, although services and comprehensive assistance tend to be more concentrated in places with a higher population density. Rural women may be more vulnerable to this issue if assistance and justice cannot be easily accessed.

This challenging scenario reveals the need to promote integrated and coordinated policies aimed at eliminating gender inequality and promoting a more equal society. It is for this reason that we are moving forward with concrete actions and strategies to institutionalize this process.



*Gender equality is a daily challenge for me. In my position as Minister of Development, this challenge means providing the tools and the necessary support so that every woman can grow, feel empowered, choose freely and reach her full potential throughout her life. In my personal experience, being in daily contact with women, I have witnessed the transformative power of all women. From those who support their families in rural environments to those who build early childhood centers for their own children and for other mothers as well, so that they too can go to work knowing that their sons and daughters are properly looked after. Also, the power of those women who develop productive enterprises where a single idea generates a process that brings entire communities to life. Gender equality also challenges me as a mother, to raise my boys with values of equality.”*

In an effort to prioritize and incorporate gender approach into all public policies and promote women’s empowerment, the National Women’s Institute (INAM) was created in 2017. It provides continuity for the actions developed by the National Women’s Council, which was active between 1992 and 2017. The INAM was created as a decentralized body within the Ministry of Social Development, with the rank of State Secretariat.

Currently, official statistics have become available. A joint initiative between the Statistics and Census Institute (INDEC) and the INAM, together with the organizations that provide assistance to women who suffer from gender violence, resulted in the creation of a Single Registry for Cases of Violence against Women, covering the period between 2013 and 2017, to compensate for the historical lack of information that had kept this problem hidden.

We have promoted the first National Equality Plan, through which 36 organizations have jointly drafted a total of 200 commitments, including goals, indicators and terms. Through this initiative, our country complies with the international obligations it assumed when it adhered to the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations, the recommendations made by organizations such as the CEDAW Committee, the Human Rights Council of the UN and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

The National Equality Plan is not just a roadmap but a plan of action to achieve gender equality in Argentina. This is the first time in our country's history that the Executive Power is making a commitment to gender equality in an articulated, strategic and integrated manner. Furthermore, the Plan will be centrally monitored by an independent organization, in view of the importance this has not only for our government but also for the entire society.

In the workplace, the existing salary gap is definitely an unresolved issue. In many cases, women earn in one year what their male colleagues make in 8 months. Additionally, with respect to managerial positions, there is usually more male presence. Generally speaking, in Argentina, women suffer from higher unemployment rates, more unstable paid work conditions, and lower salaries. Furthermore, a high percentage of women have endured sexual harassment in the workplace by their bosses, coworkers or clients. This scenario is usually associated with the traditional belief that female workers should have a secondary role in the workplace, as they are considered highly unstable, undertrained or limited by motherhood. In other words, a stereotypical approach is applied to their profile in accordance with roles historically assigned to each gender.

For this reason, the Executive Power has sent a bill to the National Congress, seeking to ensure equal pay and opportunities in all work-related aspects, banning any type of discrimination based on gender or marital status. The project proposes amendments to the Work Contract Act to support women who suffer from gender bias, giving mothers and fathers more flexibility to care for their children, establishing leave of absence due to gender violence, extending maternity and paternity leave, or absence resulting from assisted reproduction or adoption procedures, and making it possible to temporarily shorten the work day with proportional pay for both mothers and fathers.

We are also fostering the Gender Equality Initiative in Argentina as part of a group of actions promoted by countries in the region, through a partnership between the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the World Economic Forum, to bridge gender gaps from an economic perspective. The goal of this action is to increase women's participation in the economy, bridge the pay gap between men and women, and support women's participation in leadership positions.

In 2018, our country hosted the Women 20 (W20), an engagement group of the G20 made up of a transnational network of women leaders, which seeks to impact decision-making groups with respect to implementing gender-equal policies. The Argentine chapter of the W20 supports economic growth with gender inclusion based on four pillars: labor, digital, financial and rural. Also, its goal is to apply a gender focus across all engagement groups of the G20.

Historically, women have played a key role in the reproduction, care and upbringing of children. Therefore, their lack of empowerment and the difficulties they face have a direct negative impact on their children's development. There is a proven correlation between a mother's wellbeing and empowerment and the positive development of their children. For many women, the only way to combine caring for their children and generating income is to enter the informal economy with unstable incomes, which hinders their access to child care services. This scenario is even worse for rural women, for whom the possibility of receiving these services is even lower.

For this reason, we have implemented the National Early Childhood Plan. One of its components focuses on Early Childhood Centers, where girls and boys are cared for from an integrated perspective (nutritional assistance, early stimulation and psychomotor skills, disease prevention and promotion of health). We are currently promoting the establishment of these Centers in rural areas of Argentina in order to achieve equality of opportunity. The First Years National Program seeks to strengthen the capacities of families raising children between 0 and 4 years of age in a context of poverty. The program is available throughout the country, and succeeds in supporting the upbringing of children in rural communities of Indigenous Peoples. As part of the initiative, reading material was provided in different languages including Pilagá, Wichi and Quom, to support parents in raising her children.

With regard to access to comprehensive healthcare, we implemented the Unwanted Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Plan. This initiative incorporates the gender perspective and the empowerment of women across the different goals and lines of action. This is even more relevant for young rural women, who find it more difficult to access not only contraceptive methods but also the information they need to exercise their sexuality in a responsible, autonomous manner.

In Argentina, we have broadened the early childhood programs offered. The children of seasonal and independent workers (*monotributistas*, who pay a single unified monthly tax), mostly linked to rural activities, have been included. It is worth noting that this type of program strengthens women's empowerment, given that this initiative has a stronger impact, thus helping them exercise more autonomy in their household decisions.

Based on the information resulting from the National Survey on Low Income Neighborhoods, thousands of families living in vulnerable settlements can now access a certificate of family housing, which allows them to legally certify their address before any official authority. Women are the protagonists of this historic process, representing 58% of all heads of household.

Women account for more than 70% of social assistance program beneficiaries, and their support is actively promoted in an attempt to increase their autonomy and empowerment. Likewise, women-led productive enterprises and their trade circuits are also strengthened in vulnerable rural communities, promoting local development and the principles of fair trade.

The *Pro-Huerta* Program carries out projects focused on women for producing their own food, and trading any excess production through orchards and farms. Another line of action fosters projects associated with the access to water based on initiatives to capture rain water through cisterns, watersheds and springs. This policy has a significant impact on rural women, who are traditionally in charge of providing the water, often having to walk for miles to do so.

Finally, another component of the gender agenda developed in Argentina in recent years has to do with the eradication of violence against women. For the first time in Argentina, a National Action Plan against Gender Violence was developed with two main lines of action: on one hand, prevention and equality in education, and on the other, integrated assistance and support for women suffering from gender violence. The Plan clearly sets forth the decision and political will of the Government to include as a state policy the right of every person to live a violence-free life.

Furthermore, we have made a commitment to the relatives of women who have died as a result of violence, taking concrete actions against this scourge. The Brisa Act establishes the payment of a monthly compensation to the children of victims of femicide. Gender violence leaves hundreds of children without their mother, and so supporting these children and promoting equal educational policies is our priority.

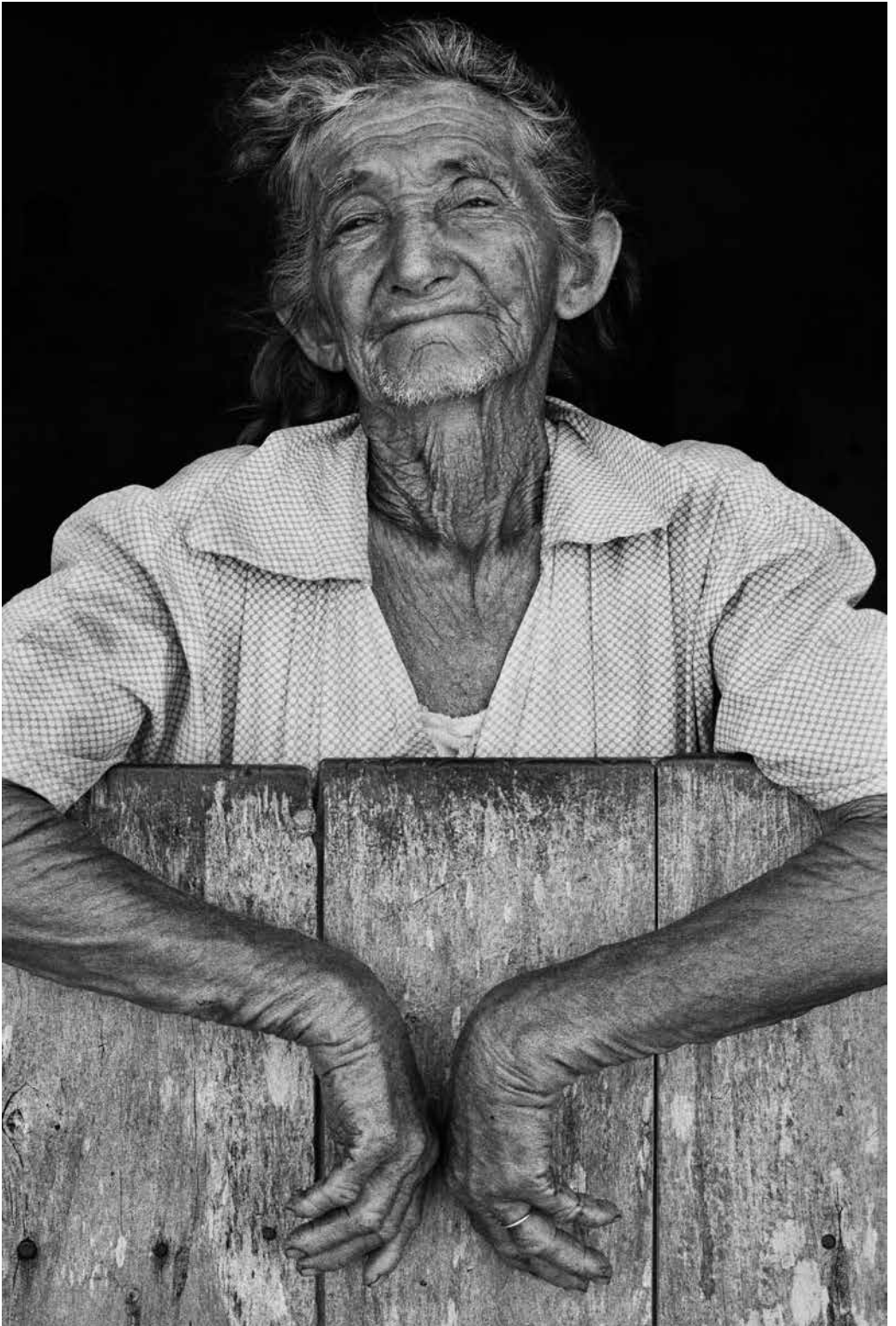
The challenge of building a society with zero inequality is a commitment we must all undertake. Along with the changes and progress made by women, it becomes necessary to include and involve men in this fight. Their involvement in equality initiatives is a process that is essential for the development of a democratic society. We must think of ourselves as a whole, leaving behind the concepts of men and women as an imposed duality that was used to define roles, establish barriers and distribute tasks. Predefined female and male roles will only limit our dreams, projects and concerns. This does not entail a denial of the differences, but is an attempt to incorporate equality as a legal, ethical and political principle.

Gender equality is a daily challenge for me. In my position as Minister of Development, this challenge means providing the tools and the necessary support so that every woman can grow, feel empowered, choose freely and reach her full potential throughout her life. In my personal experience, being in daily contact with women, I have witnessed the transformative power of all women. From those who support their families in rural environments to those who build early childhood centers for their own children and for other mothers as well, so that they too can go to work knowing that their sons and daughters are properly looked after. Also, the power of those women who develop productive enterprises where a single idea generates a process that brings entire communities to life. Gender equality also challenges me as a mother, to raise my boys with values of equality. Setting free the potential of women and girls has a multiplier effect, which not only benefits women, but society as a whole. Therefore, this struggle cannot be led by women alone; it must become a standard for the whole of society.

**3**

**In Our DNA**

**Rural worker in the  
Brazilian semi-arid region**  
Ceará, Brazil  
1983  
©Sebastião Salgado







# The pivotal role of rural women in the development of Paraguay

Inequality is more pronounced in rural areas and, compared to their male counterparts, rural women face discrimination in accessing goods and services and participating in social and political life

*Silvana Abdo\**

I have the opportunity to travel throughout our country and to interact with many rural women, observing first-hand the value of their work in these areas. It is abundantly clear that they are the invisible backbone of family farming, productivity, farm labor, and family sustenance in Paraguay. In our conversations during these encounters, we always agree that we have the opportunity to make a real push for recognition of the value of women's work in the countryside.

In our country, 1.3 million rural women maintain their households and their community through their work. These are the efforts that we want to spotlight and to recognize through public policies, given the role that rural women play in reproduction, production, and the community, and the fact that that they toil and shoulder a significant workload, which is often disregarded and rarely valued.

Despite their pivotal role and active contribution to the local and national economy, they continue to suffer discrimination, as reflected in their lower income, scant resources, limited opportunities, and other forms of inequality.

\* First Lady  
Republic of  
Paraguay

There are many challenges that we must tackle as a society, particularly as it concerns women in the rural environment. We, at the Office of the First Lady (OPD), are working to bring them out of the shadows and to ensure that they are included at all levels of society. We are convinced that providing them with better opportunities and greater access to and control of land will contribute to the sustainable development and improvement of farming communities.

We want to guarantee basic rights and financial independence, which are fundamental to their empowerment and personal development.

Data provided by Paraguay's Ministry of Women to the United Nations in 2015 allows us a better understanding of this reality: the main gender gaps in the country involve access to and control of resources, opportunities, services, and participation in decision-making. Inequality is more pronounced in rural areas and, compared to their male counterparts, rural women face discrimination in accessing goods and services and participating in social and political life.

At the Office of the First Lady (OPD), we want to embrace an integrated model that empowers women in all spheres, and in doing so to help them to gain their genuine and longed-for independence. My focus is on including an emphasis on women's empowerment—particularly rural women—in public policies aimed at development and social well-being. We are working and pushing for a greater leadership role for rural women in Paraguay, through the *Ley Nacional - N° 5446/2015 de Políticas Públicas para Mujeres Rurales (National Law N° 5446/2015 on Public Policies for Rural Women)*, which arose out of the involvement of rural women themselves. The law is now in the process of being approved, for its subsequent implementation.

### **Status of Rural Women in Paraguay**

Article 2° of National Law N° 5446/2015 defines the rural woman as “a woman whose livelihood and income are directly or indirectly linked to agriculture, livestock, craftwork, or any other productive activity that takes place in the rural environment, and who is socially, economically, and culturally vulnerable”.

According to a 2008 report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United

Nations (FAO), Paraguayan women in rural areas have historically fought for their rights, organizing themselves into movements. Up to 2000, there was only one

*Poverty in women is directly linked to sociocultural factors, which affect their ability to access education, basic services, credit, the workforce, training or land ownership. All these factors limit their opportunities to become financially independent”*

women's group at the national level: the *Coordinación de Mujeres Campesinas*, which is part of the overall peasant movement - *Movimiento Campesino Paraguayo*. Subsequently, with the creation of the *Coordinación Nacional de Mujeres Rurales e Indígenas* (National Organization of Rural and Indigenous Women), women were given their own forum, gaining greater visibility, and through their efforts making important gains in terms of health and educational services in rural areas.

In Paraguay, 47.14% of the population is rural and rural women represent 18.23% of the overall population, for a total of 1,267,835 people. Women are the heads of household in 25.06% of rural homes, figures that were obtained from the 2015 revision of the 2000-2025 national population projections by the General Directorate of Statistics, Surveys, and Census (DGEEC).

Poverty in women is directly linked to sociocultural factors, which affect their ability to access education, basic services, credit, the workforce, training or land ownership. All these factors limit their opportunities to become financially independent, earn an income, take care of their expenses, or make decisions about their production resources.

The empowerment of women, and particularly rural women, through the application of *Law N° 5446/2015*, is one of our priorities. Providing them with more access to financial resources gives them a real opportunity to exercise their social and economic rights. This offers working women a stake in the future.

### **Initiatives for the empowerment of rural women in Paraguay**

Taking into account the obstacles faced by rural women seeking platforms for engagement, personal and professional progress, we, in Paraguay, are working through various government institutions. We have embarked on a very important challenge: the economic and social empowerment of rural women.

As part of our actions to empower our rural women, we are focusing on key areas to enable greater engagement and economic, social, and cultural inclusion. In this way, our actions, projects, and legislation will help to reduce their vulnerability. We aim to be an agent of change that contributes to reshaping and eradicating customs that have become entrenched in Paraguayan culture over time.

#### **- Public Policies for Rural Women**

National Law N° 5446/2015 on Public Policies for Rural Women is a law that was enacted as a result of the work and active participation of rural women. Its main objective is to promote and guarantee the economic, social, political, and cultural rights of rural women, which are critical to their empowerment and development. This legislation is extremely important in gaining recognition for the work of rural women, who are at a disadvantage, due to numerous difficulties and/or obstacles, which has prompted the establishment of the Interinstitutional Commission

for Application of the Law (CIAL), which coordinates the actions of 15 State institutions that work for the advancement of rural women.

Among the noteworthy results and achievements of this law are technical, financial, production, organizational, and trade-related assistance; training in marketing management; and access to technology.

Yet, despite the tangible results, the actions thus far have impacted only a little more than 1% of rural women. We have faith that this law and further efforts will yield exponentially greater results during our administration.

### **-The Kuña Katupyry Project**

In collaboration with the National Development Bank, I have been involved in this project since I first became First Lady. Its main purpose is to assist women living in poverty to access financing for economic activities, under favorable terms and without the need for collateral. The project targets women of limited financial means, who are between 18 and 75 years, and who require financial resources to undertake economic activities. These resources should be used to meet operational capital or small investment needs, to develop economic activities in rural and urban areas across the country. I am confident that Kuña Katupyry is a very important tool for the empowerment of women, by strengthening their economic activities.

### **The empowerment of rural women: present and future**

The rural woman's role in the development of rural areas is a tangible and undeniable reality. She works, produces, maintains her household, and fosters community development. It is time that we recognize this hard-working figure as the lynchpin of our economy

The future of this country's rural working women will depend in great part on strengthening this sector and facilitating greater engagement, with more women leaders at the helm of organizations, thus facilitating greater recognition of the pivotal role of rural woman in Paraguay.

We are confident that our administration at the OPD will further the development of rural women, and that this empowerment will persist over time, generating opportunities for this sector, which to this day is vulnerable and subject to discrimination.

The empowerment of rural women will help to spur the change that we are advocating for Paraguay, thereby eliminating the inequality that hurts us all and creating a new reality for the well-being of our entire country.

# Weaving My Way into the Fabric and Looms of Argentina's Rural Women

In New York, Milan, London and Paris,  
clothes that breathe new life into  
age-old techniques are all the rage

*Verónica Alfie\**

**G**raciela Carrasco lives in the parched, red-soil regions of Argentina's northwest. Like other women from Belen, in the province of Catamarca, she spins and weaves... weaving ponchos and dreams. With patience and with pride.

The women in her village weave with llama and sheep's wool just as their grandmothers and great-great-grandmothers have done for more than 200 years. Finding the thread, dyeing it to reflect the colors of the leaves and flowers of the countryside, and sitting in front of their looms weaving demands time and knowledge... and patience! This tradition has been passed down from generation to generation in this small town, which is the birthplace of the Argentinian poncho. As Graciela says, "It's what we do every day, from Monday to Monday."

She is filled with a sense of satisfaction and pride at having woven the poncho that the President of Argentina presented as a gift to Pope Francis, when visiting him in Rome. That was a red letter day for the entire village. Graciela had a dream –as she explains in her *YouTube* video- that Argentinian ponchos would one day reach the entire world.

\* Fashion designer  
Creator of the  
Veroalfie brand  
Buenos Aires,  
Argentina

And, now my fashion brand, Veroalfie, is trying to work with Graciela and her community to make this dream come true.

One day I visited the village where Graciela lives with her husband Ramon, armed with lots of creative and even presumptuous ideas: I wanted to interest the women of the community in adding value to their traditional ponchos by enhancing them with design and fashion elements. Frankly, I realized that it would be extremely difficult, but I explained the project to them and they replied, with characteristic enthusiasm, “We’ll have a sample ready for you tomorrow!” It was the beginning of a win-win partnership.

We have already been working together for four seasons!

I enjoy working with the women of Belen, a village 2,750 meters above sea level, where time seems to have come to a halt. When we go there to prepare a collection,

we drink *mate* (herbal tea) together and eat the empanadas that the women make. It is a real experience: the food, the smells, the flavors, the place itself and the way in which they weave...

It is important to mention that each region of Argentina has a different way of weaving. In Tucumán, another province in the country’s northwest region, the looms are circular, while in Catamarca they are square in shape. And the looms in villages in countries further north, such as Bolivia or Peru, are even more distinct and ancient.

### **Creating value, understanding consumers**

For entrepreneurs of any sector, adding value is becoming more and more crucial to their business. They must create and promote new trends of all kinds, which, as is the case in our example, transcend fashion. It’s a question of cultural trends. Of innovation. And it is happening because new consumers, who are increasingly knowledgeable

“For entrepreneurs of any sector, adding value is becoming more and more crucial to their business. They must create and promote new trends of all kinds, which, as is the case in our example, transcend fashion. It’s a question of cultural trends. Of innovation. And it is happening because new consumers, who are increasingly knowledgeable and who demand quality, are gradually imposing their tastes. Rather than merely acquiring objects, these consumers want to purchase environmentally-friendly experiences and they demand to know how the goods and services they buy were produced. In the most sophisticated fashion markets, such as New York, Milan, London or Paris, customers are clamoring for items that are inspired by and embrace age-old techniques. This trend is rooted in customs that have been repeated and handed down from generation to generation, for hundreds of years.”

and who demand quality, are gradually imposing their tastes. Rather than merely acquiring objects, these consumers want to purchase environmentally-friendly experiences and they demand to know how the goods and services they buy were produced. International markets are increasingly demanding products that reflect the identity of the country in which they are made. Understanding this idea opens up markets but above all, generates employment and income for groups that have been forgotten or ignored, simply because they live in remote areas, far removed from the centers of power in the cities.

In the most sophisticated fashion markets, such as New York, Milan, London or Paris, customers are clamoring for items that are inspired by and embrace age-old techniques. This trend is rooted in customs that have been replicated and handed down from generation to generation, for hundreds of years.

I am sure that you must have noticed that every season Navajo prints and Aztec designs, Greek tunics, blouses with gypsy embroidery, Colombian bags, embroidered jeans or ethnic jewelry with a tribal flavor are all the rage. The formula is to differentiate ourselves, but also to get back to the basics, to our roots: who we are and where we come from.

Of course, I did not invent this concept. In the United States, for example, a fantastic store called *Anthropologie*, with a vision similar to the one I described, opened its first boutique in 1992 and today it has 200 stores worldwide. The prestigious clothing firm describes its customer as “a creative-minded woman, who wants to look like herself, rather than follow the crowd. She is also adventurous about what she wears, and although fashion is important to her, she is too busy enjoying life to be a slave to the latest trends.”

So, today I sell my products in *Anthropologie*. When I offered them my products they said, “We buy the essence of each country”.

How can we depict the essence of a country, if our fashion photos are the same as in any city? If I am an Argentine designer, where should I show my new collection? The answer is very simple: in Catamarca, in Jujuy or wherever I found the inspiration or the materials to create my pieces. That is why I have succeeded. If I don't work with the rural women in my country, showing their way of life and their landscapes, I'm not selling anything. Studio photos are irrelevant.

The landscapes shown in the photographs of our latest collection –the dry earth, the bare mountains, the unpaved, red dirt roads, the cactus and the red brick houses – are simply a part of what we sell, or should I say, what we promote. The materials used are also native to Argentina and the Andes region, such as the llama, vicuña and guanaco wool that is so typical of our highland region. Our unique and distinctive ponchos and shawls reveal our essence to the world, showing what we are made of, where we come from.

In summary, I believe that we need to return to our roots, that is, to work with rural communities. Modern, authentic designers in each Latin American country

can and are already doing it. This will define fashion for many years to come, as it continues to be a reflection of different places in the world.

Our countries have already had positive experiences, for example, the Panama hats – now a symbol of excellence - crafted out of toquilla straw by skillful Ecuadorean hands. Production of these hats has multiplied, with a wide range of colors and designs now available, but they are still distinctive, mainly due to the quality and flexibility of the fibers.

Each region is unique and the challenge is to ensure that the designs reflect this - and that is where we come in, as designers. With our support, we hope that this will spawn the transformation of other craft ventures into high fashion. We are merely the people who connect the craftswomen to a world that is perhaps alien to them – the undoubtedly competitive world of fashion.

We understand that fashion today needs to show how these rural women live, what lies behind a collection, what lies behind a brand. In reality, the work teams and partnerships with the craftswomen bring our designs to life. The name of the person who made the piece is also printed on the labels and published on our web site. They sell us their shawls or ponchos and we place these products on the international markets, but they still have their own shops and sell at craft fairs.

At present, with government support, rural weavers are organizing themselves and developing a program to create a country brand. I will assist them, as will others. I will offer design support to help them to make their own collections.

### **Twenty years working together**

I have always loved hand-made items: embroidery, ceramics and candles. I also like fine, high-quality materials, like alpaca or llama wool. I'm attracted to indigenous things, although I also enjoy launching projects and creating brands. I pay attention to the market and listen to consumers.

My experience with these groups of rural women began 20 years ago. I worked first in Peru and then in Argentina, especially in the northwest, in Catamarca and Jujuy.

I like to work with them in their own environment, rather than bringing them all the way to Buenos Aires. We want to know their histories, see their children, build a relationship, get a sense of how they feel, see them become empowered. It's incredible. My approach is not to tell them that they should do this or that, but rather to work with them to develop a collection and support them in selling their products outside of their communities.

The techniques used to make our products are invaluable; they are authentic and the more natural they are, the better they sell. I must be very clear: this



is no longer craftwork – it is fashion. We try to lift the craft to another level to transform it into fashion, into fashion for the world.

Just as I embraced success by working with indigenous people, many other designers can make a worthwhile contribution by recognizing that these craftswomen and craftsmen are the best capital that our countries have to offer. I work with six or seven groups in different regions of the country, not all women; there are men too. They all deserve to be heard. They should be heard.



# The Woman Whose Tears Flowed from One Eye Only

If she hadn't been an orphan, maybe she would have been a writer. Or an actress.  
She was a marvelous storyteller

*Pilar Álvarez Molero\**

Pilar Huertas crossed the street slowly early in the morning, and knocked on the door of the house across the street. One of her sisters opened it:

-María, I just gave birth -she said.

- But how come you didn't tell me?

-Oh, it's nothing.

28 years old and a with a husband away at war, Pilar had just given birth, alone, to her daughter Belén. It had been the same with her first child Juanico, born when she was 23. Pepa, the next one, almost didn't live to tell the story. She was born with her umbilical cord wrapped twice around her neck and a bluish face. Then came four more: Paco, Adela, Antonio and Jorge. These last four were born with the help of a neighbor or one of her sisters. All of them at home, in her own bed.

\* Journalist.  
Gender  
correspondent for  
El País newspaper,  
Spain

She herself was born in 1914, and was headed for a good life until destiny put a stop to it. Her father, Paco, was a tradesman with high potential: he owned a slaughterhouse, a cured meat shop and *Las Campanas* inn, located in

downtown Granada in the south of Spain. But the man suddenly became a widower with seven children and one on the way who never made it. Pilar was only three when her mother died, rumors say out of pure exhaustion.

They moved from Granada to the small town of Domingo Pérez. They had relatives there who helped with Paco's orphans, his six daughters and his only male offspring until he remarried. There were olive trees and wheat to plow, and the land gave them lentils and *chicharos*, a crop similar to peas to feed the animals. In Pérez, he opened a grocery store, a shoe store and another inn. But in this town of 600 people, there was no way to continue with the girls' education at a time when illiteracy in Spain neared 70% in children under the age of 10<sup>1</sup> and affected mostly women. The likely future for most girls was taking care of the household and the children. This was Pilar's fate, due to a promise that had painted it black.

"Dear Lord, if they all come back safe and sound I will forever wear black". Her only brother and the husbands of two of her sisters had gone to the battlefield, as well as the man she had just married, Juan. He was a man not used to taking sides, which is probably why he ended up fighting for both.

They all came back alive. And so she was forever in mourning, with her long black skirt and stockings, blouse and cardigan and rubber-sole cloth shoes, an attire that made her look ancient at merely 25. They could not make ends meet.

For a year, she traveled into the city with her daughter Belén in her arms. Sometimes she had no money but went anyway. She had to visit her husband in prison, and bring him food, tobacco and some moral support.

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*Looking back, one realizes how much has changed. Unfortunately, too many things are still the same. The type of work my grandmother used to do and that millions of women still do today remains unpaid. They are the cooks, cleaners, caregivers and heads of household. And what women earn by working on the farms, if anything at all, is way below what men earn.”*

This was all the result of giving food to the enemy. On a June day, Juan was plowing wheat when a group of men came down from the hills and demanded he give them food. They were the Spanish Maquis, the armed resistance to Franco that subsisted in hiding during the Civil War in Spain. Juan went to town, came back with cod, bread and meat. Someone reported this to the authorities and he was sent to jail for a year.

The trip from Domingo Pérez to Granada currently takes only

1 Data extracted from the report *Alfabetización y escolarización en España (Literacy and Schooling in Spain) (1887-1950)*, by Narciso de Gabriel <https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:ZZ1z0BNyiNUJ:https://www.mecd.gob.es/dctm/revista-de-educacion/articulosre314/re3141100462.pdf%3FdocumentId%3D0901e72b81272c6b+%amp;cd=3&hl=es&ct=clnk&gl=es&client=firefox-b>

thirty minutes on the highway, but in the past it involved walking eight kilometers through the countryside to the nearby town of Iznalloz, where there was a train to the capital. Then, one more hour of a rocky train ride sitting on the third-class wooden benches, with extreme heat in the summer and intense cold in the winter. Pilar sat on the last seat and hoped not to be seen. The day the inspector asked for her ticket and she did not have it, she lied for the first time in her life: “I’m so sorry, with the baby I seem to have lost it”.

Between the war, the long military service for Juan and the time spent in jail, several years went by before any money came into the house. They survived on a few olive trees, and with the help of Pilar’s sisters and Juan’s mother. Pilar’s father, Paco, had died when she was a teenager. Despite it all, the children never missed a meal.

The war ended, and so did Juan’s jail time. The children kept coming. Pilar woke up every morning to prepare a huge pan of breadcrumbs with garlic or baked potatoes. This was everyone’s breakfast as well as lunch for Juan, which he took to the farm. Juanico, his first son, soon started joining him at the age of eight. If the chicken laid eggs, the potatoes had a garnish. Most mornings, it was just the potatoes with some coffee and milk from the goat in the pen, on the ground floor of the house. Dinner usually consisted of chickpeas, bacon and hambone. Chicken and fine pork meat were reserved for special occasions.

When she was finished cooking, Pilar Huertas set up the fire with hay to warm up the house. She made the woolen beds, and had to fluff up each mattress for a while to prevent the strips from lumping and ending up at the foot or head of the bed. She scraped the floors on all fours. She also crouched to wash an entire basket of clothes in the river every day. Then she did the shopping, at a store where they only had cod, sugar and rice. Their real supermarket was their own garden and the animals in the stall. Each May, they scrubbed the entire house. She fed the pigs and cleaned the pigsties if Juan couldn’t. It was important to fatten them to ensure a productive slaughter in December.

As the children grew older, she spent whatever free time she had reading. Someone had given her the two volumes of Don Quixote with off-white covers. Pilar sat on a chair and slowly turned the pages. She tried to do this every day, with sunshine streaming in through the window or in the dark next to a candle.

She also went to church every day, driven by a combination of Christian determination and evasion. Her daughter Pepa claimed this was the only place where she could be in silence, away from the uproar from the children, the rants of her husband or the gossiping of her neighbors. All in all, she considered herself a lucky woman.

-I have seven children like seven flowers; my children have no flaws- she said.

-Mom, don’t exaggerate- responded Pepa.

-I mean none of them is cross-eyed or has a limp. They have no defects.

In her town, there is a saying for people like her. Those who don't have much, but are blessed with a healthy, living family that never goes hungry. The saying goes: "She has nothing to complain about, her tears come from one eye only". People in Pérez still use this proverb.

Maybe if she hadn't been an orphan, she would've been a writer. Or an actress. She was a marvelous storyteller. She narrated the tale of her orphaned childhood and the adventures of Fernandico, the little boy hired by her father to work on the farm and whom they adopted as one more brother. That was better than TV, a device that hadn't yet arrived in town. Her daughters had to fight with their friends to go out on the street and play. The rest preferred to stay and listen to Pilar's stories by candlelight.

The black uniform always accompanied her, with a bow holding her hair together. Only towards the end of her life, was she inadvertently released from mourning. While she was sick, her daughters sometimes dressed her in a blouse with tiny white flowers or a grey checkered skirt. At 51, she started developing Parkinson's, which consumed her over the course of a decade. First she lost sensitivity in her fingers, then her tongue got stuck and finally, the stumbling and tripping.

During her final years, she barely spoke or recognized people. But she continued telling stories with her gestures. She formed the shape of a hollow hand, placed it over her chin and laughed. "Yes, yes" she mumbled, imitating Pepa's new muscular boyfriend, thus indicating her approval of this good-natured youngster, who was first a baker and now worked in a bank.

Pilar died shortly after Pepa and her boyfriend Paco, my parents, got married. I never got to meet the woman who read the Quixote in her free time, although I often think about her story. We have rights our grandmothers never had.

At 23, the age at which she had her first child, I was fresh out of college and living in Italy. I was there for a year to learn the language and travel throughout the country and Europe, performing in plays. I inherited her eagerness to tell stories and her passion for reading. Were it not for the tenacity of this matriarch dressed in black, who fluffed up the beds every day and escaped to the local parish church, I would not be writing about these great anonymous women who, like her, were the pioneers in a closed-up world and who gave up everything so that rural Spain, an impoverished black-and white moorland devastated by war, could flourish once again.

Just looking back reveals how much has changed. Unfortunately, too many things are still the same. The type of work my grandmother used to do and that millions of women still do today remains unpaid. They are the cooks, cleaners, caregivers and heads of household. And what women earn by working on the farms, if anything at all, is way below what men earn. In Spain, quite a large number of women fall

within the salary range of 400 to 1000 Euros (455-1138 USD) as opposed to men, most of whom make between 1001 and 1400 Euros (1139 - 1593 USD).<sup>2</sup>

Despite major breakthroughs in health, one out of five births still takes place without a qualified midwife to assist. Almost 31 million babies were born without proper care in 2016<sup>3</sup>, with women risking their lives and their children's lives. Like my grandmother almost 100 years ago, who crossed the street and knocked on her sister Maria's door: "But how come you didn't tell me...?".

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2 Data extracted from the **Ministry of Agriculture of Spain**

[https://www.mapama.gob.es/es/desarrollo-rural/temas/igualdad\\_genero\\_y\\_des\\_sostenible/](https://www.mapama.gob.es/es/desarrollo-rural/temas/igualdad_genero_y_des_sostenible/)

3 Data from **Unicef, Maternal Health** <https://data.unicef.org/topic/maternal-health/delivery-care/>





# More women in agriculture to feed the world

Women around the world are having a material impact on a way of life that is largely perceived as male dominated

*Dana Bolden\**

**O**n her humble 150-acre farm in China's Hebei province, Wu Gui Qin is changing the face of agriculture. Here, in the rolling countryside, miles from the nearest urban center, the 65-year old woman farmer is growing some of the most productive corn crops in all of China.

Like so many small-holder farmers, she wears many hats and is a tireless multi-tasker. She's meticulous about the nutrients and protection she uses to ensure healthy yields, efficient water management, and soil conservation. She keeps a close eye on weather systems and encroaching pests. And she's vigilant in walking her fields every day and sharing her constantly expanding knowledge with the rest of her village. In fact, Ms. Qin is legendary for providing selfless mentoring and counseling to other farmers, especially young women who are trying to make a difference.

**\* Senior Vice-  
President,  
External Affairs  
and Sustainability  
for Corteva  
Agriscience**

Today, because of her efforts, her village and surround areas are in the midst of an impressive rural economic and agricultural renewal. Yields are increasing across local farms, more young people and women are finding

sustainable jobs in agriculture, and nutritious food is being produced at a rate never seen before in this remote corner of the country.

Ms. Qin's story, of course, is not unique. Women around the world are having a material impact on a way of life that is largely perceived as male dominated. Or as the World Bank recently cited in a report, "*Women make up almost half of the world's farmers, and over the last few decades, they have broadened their involvement in agriculture. The number of female-headed farming households has also increased as more men have migrated to cities. As the primary caregivers to families and communities, women provide food and nutrition; they are the human link between the farm and the table.*"

Women's contributions have never been more needed. In fact, when you sit down for dinner tonight, consider a few mind-numbing realities. About 7.7 billion people around the world are aspiring for similar sustenance. Over the next 30 years, that number will likely jump by another 2.5 billion people.

To put that into perspective, that's the equivalent of adding another India and China to our planet within most of our lifetimes. That's a lot of food we're going to need – across the developing world, but also across our most heavily developed economies. No one is immune from the threat of food scarcity and security.

Bear with me now, as I posit a couple more startling realizations. Feeding this growing world is going to require, among other things, converting more natural land into farmland. Estimates claim at the minimum we're going to have to convert an area the size of Mexico to farms over the next three decades. Or, if we don't manage agriculture production efficiently, it could go as high as an area the size of Canada, which is five times the size of Mexico.

More people. More food needed. More land and resources required. More pressure on the environment. If this sounds daunting, well, it is. And it's going to impact the way we live, where we live, and how we live for generations to come.

Indeed, agriculture is at a crossroads. While no one truly has a crystal ball, one thing we do know about the future of agriculture and food production is that the status quo isn't going to cut it. We're going to have to double productivity in just the next 20 years to stay on course,

*How do remedy this inequality? Awareness is the first step and one thing we heard loud and clear from women farmers around the world was that the more communication is needed to showcase the challenges and opportunities facing women in farming."*

and do so without spoiling the very land, water and air resources that make food production possible.

The good news is we have the innovation acumen and intellectual capital within the agriculture industry and value chain to create an environmentally sustainable, food secure world.

But none of this will work without closing the gap between men and women in agriculture.

The simple truth is we can't feed the world over the next 30 years and beyond without more women in farming. In fact, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that if women farmers are given equal access to productive resources such as land, water and financial credit, they can produce 20- to 30 percent more food. That alone will lift 150 million people out of hunger, and significantly more as greater numbers of women enter into farming.

Empowering women farmers and encouraging more young women to build careers in agriculture are central to our mission at Corteva Agriscience. To better understand the current status of women farmers around the world and to create a baseline from which we can measure growth in the future, we commissioned a study last year to look at the lives and concerns of women in agriculture in 17 countries across five regions of the world.

Our 'Global Women in Agriculture' study found that while women are overwhelmingly proud to be in agriculture, they perceive widespread discrimination regardless of geography, ranging from 78 percent who feel that way in India to 52 percent in the United States.

Only half of the women farmers surveyed around the world said they are equally successful as their male counterparts, and just 42 percent expressed that women and men are given the same opportunities in general. About a third of respondents said it will take a decade or longer before women begin to reach a level of parity with male farmers.

Another key finding of our study included a significant gap in salary. In fact, 40 percent of women farmers globally reported earning significantly lower income than their male counterparts.

Closely related, 36 percent of women farmers felt that they had less access to financing than male farmers, and larger numbers felt that a lack of agriculture training available to women was a major inhibitor to growth and success.

In fact, the desire for training emerged as the most commonly cited need among the respondents for removing gender inequality obstacles. The numbers significantly exceeded 50 percent for all 17 countries with Brazil, Nigeria, Kenya, Mexico, and South Africa citing the highest need for training.

Clearly, while our report was not surprising, it certainly pointed out the striking need and urgency for reform and equality. So, how do remedy this inequality? Awareness is the first step and one thing we heard loud and clear from women farmers around the world was that the more communication is needed to showcase the challenges and opportunities facing women in farming.

We saw this as a great opportunity to dedicate more time and attention on [corteva.com](http://corteva.com), our company website, to capture compelling short films of women farmers around the world who are running successful farming operations, uplifting their local communities, and inspiring new generations of women in agriculture.

Stories like Ms. Qin from China, and Pratima Devi from India who is balancing work, family and community life while operating a successful rice operation. And Eunice Wangui Murunga from Kenya who chronicles her journey of risk and personal renewal by stretching herself to pursue her passion in farming, a similar story shared by Marilyn Hershey who is now running a successful 800-cattle dairy operation on the outskirts of metro Philadelphia.

I encourage you to check out these and other great stories by going to our website <https://www.corteva.com/thisismystory.html> and sharing “This is My Story” features with your networks.

Getting the word out is critical and nothing better enables that than compelling and engaging stories of women who are changing the face of agriculture.

Of course, awareness only goes so far. We learned from our survey of women farmers that more on-the-ground training and assistance are needed.

One such training program that we launched in Zambia with a local NGO is showing great promise. It’s geared toward helping smallholder and women farmers move beyond subsistence farming. Today in Zambia, 80 percent of the country’s 1.4 million farmers produce corn, yet only 27 percent produce enough to sell. The biggest stumbling blocks here are lack of access to productivity-enhancing inputs, good crop management practices and connections to farm markets, particularly in remote areas.

To address these challenges, we worked with our NGO partner, Muzika, to launch the Zambia Advanced Maize Seed Adoption Program (ZAMSAP), a community-based partnership. ZAMSAP provides farmers with hybrid corn seed and advisory services, as well as training in basic agronomy and financial and market literacy.

About 60 percent of participants are women and youth, and to date more than 200 women farmer groups, nearly 60 youth groups and 11 schools have engaged with the program. Participants plant and tend to experimental plots and given basic agriculture training to increase yields, reduce post-harvest losses and improve livelihoods. The program is modelled after a similar initiative in Ethiopia that has improved the quality of life for tens of thousands of female farmers across the country.

Similarly, in Brazil, we partnered with one of the best business schools – Dom Cabral Foundation - and the Brazilian Agribusiness Association (ABAG) to launch The Women’s Academy where women farmers are taught leadership skills, new agriculture practices, latest agronomy principles and public policies impacting farming, sustainability and strategic planning.

In India, we launched a mentorship and training program for women farmers, which includes new learning and practices they can employ immediately on their own farms. Each of the women who participate in the program also acts as a mentor and commits to passing knowledge down to other women across their communities, much like the leadership exemplified by Ms. Qin in China.

In North America, we have a number of training and development initiatives under way to support women, including Grow by Farm Her which educates young ladies ages 16 to 22, who are excited about their future in agriculture. The day-long events give the opportunity for young women to connect with peers, listen to speakers, and meet industry leaders. A similar program was launched in Ukraine through a partnership with a local STEM education group.

We see an opportunity for these and other programs to scale and proliferate around the world. One woman, one farmer, one community leader and mentor at a time.

In fact, they’ll have to. We need women engaged in farming. It’s more than a social and economic issue, although those are extremely important in themselves. At the end of the day, it’s about sustaining healthy, productive and nutritious lives for everyone on the planet.

Indeed, the stakes are high but so are the opportunities. Above all else, we need to act now – collectively – to ensure women have a prominent, productive and profitable path forward on our farms and rural communities around the world.



# My Name Is Epsy Like My Grandma, a Brave Rural Woman

Today, rural women are still fighting  
for the same goals as  
Miss Epsy in the 1940s

*Epsy Campbell \**

She crossed the ocean with her father, leaving her mother and many siblings behind in Jamaica. She was only ten years old, but she had already been tasked with domestic chores while her father, a mechanical engineer, worked on the railway on Costa Rica's Atlantic coast.

She would have been 100 years old today. She was my grandmother Epsy, after whom I was named. I never met her, but my father and aunts have passed down memories of her, and I credit her with being one of the central pillars of my life.

In my opinion, Miss Epsy symbolizes rural women who, as young girls, must take on adult responsibilities, without any rest and with few opportunities to study or improve their living conditions. Miss Epsy: a black migrant woman. My grandmother followed in the footsteps of all women in rural areas. She lived with her father in the coastal village of Cahuita, in the province of Limón. When she turned 17, she went to live with and married my grandfather, with whom she had many children: first six, and then one more daughter, my aunt Beatriz, when she was about 40 years old. They owned a huge plot of land in Playa Negra beach.

\* Vice President  
Republic of  
Costa Rica

She and her husband would head out to the field very early, and she would return to the house very late to do the same household chores she had done the day before, and the day before that. She was the first person to get out of bed and the last one to go to sleep. She worked tirelessly to make sure her children and grandchildren never faced the same difficulties.

That strong, wise woman, who knew about medicinal plants and healing methods, who dressed impeccably to go to church every weekend, died unexpectedly at the age of 48, but not before passing down her love of the earth and the field to her children, especially my aunt Beatriz and my father. I believe I inherited her passion for work, as well as her determination, commitment and inability to keep still...

All of her grandchildren inherited her enormous energy for life, but I feel her influence even more strongly because I bear her name.



*As the Minister of Foreign Affairs, I am proud to announce that one of the key elements of our foreign policy for the period 2018-2022 will be Social Inclusion, Culture and Women's Economic and Political Empowerment. This is just one example of how a woman can take advantage of her position in the government to ensure that women are incorporated into the political agenda as a priority topic, not only to provide them with greater visibility, but also to search for resources, to reintroduce rural development as a critical issue, and to provide tools to all of the women who are fighting tooth and nail. We want to ensure that women are able to exercise political leadership and have a voice in decision-making platforms; when we hold a privileged position, our idea of reality can be very different from what actually occurs in the real world."*

### **Battles at home**

I can say I won my first political battles in my own home. I am part of a large family (five sisters and two brothers), and ever since I can remember, I have always considered the distribution of household chores to be unfair. My mom says that one of the first phrases I learned to say was "it's not fair!" "It's not fair that my sisters and I have to wash the dishes and they don't." "It's not fair that while they're out cleaning the yard, we have to help in the kitchen." "It's not fair that we have to make the bed and they don't." "It's not fair! It's not fair!"

I remember the day my mom realized that that little girl was going to drive her crazy and she agreed to relieve me of my chores in the kitchen and let me go out and clean the yard with my brothers. I felt like the happiest girl on the planet.



I acquired this consciousness in a family of many women, a family in our capital city. I grew up in San José and not in the port town of Puerto Limón, although my roots are in Costa Rica's Caribbean region.

My dad always tried to instill in my siblings and me an awareness of the fact that we were black; that that gave us an additional value and that we should not allow other people to discriminate against us because of it. As black people (in a predominantly white city), this was a frequent topic of discussion in our family, although perhaps other families avoided the topic entirely... My dad always told us sisters that we were pretty and smart. He and my mom always sought to provide us with a holistic education; some of us studied ballet, others dance, and others music. They believed that we had to prepare ourselves better than the average person did because life would demand more from us than from others. I believe that I inherited and built my consciousness within this family context.

I would not be me if I were not a black woman. And I have always felt happy and safe being black.

### **Young activism**

When I was a junior in high school, I went on a trip and bought a blue purse with large printed text that read, "Never underestimate the power of a woman." I happily carried that purse everywhere I went, displaying what I now believe to have been my first political banner.

I became involved in political activism at a very young age, and I had to do so as a mother, first to Tanisha and then to Bernardita. (Dad would tell me I was very smart, but I got pregnant just as I was starting college!). With two young daughters, I didn't have a lot of free time, but I never stopped being an activist.

Because of my early marriage, I went to live in Limón, where I became involved in environmental and women's organizations. Together with other women, we founded one of the first organizations of black women. We were particularly interested in rural women, precisely because we lived in a rural area.

Later on, when I returned to San José, I established more coordinated linkages with women's groups. It was the early 1990s and we had long discussions about sexism and racism and how they intersected. In 1995, I participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, which sought to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity.

I was already convinced that the transformation of humanity was the result of greater participation by women: greater participation in everything, not only in

some things and not in others. I believe that if men have a perspective, we as women have “another” perspective and should have access to the same opportunities.

### **From my position**

When you form part of a group that has historically suffered discrimination—although my life has certainly not been tragic in the least—you assume a commitment and establish a special bond with that group. I understood, from a very early age, that women of African descent, indigenous women and rural women face even more difficulties than most women do, and that not only men, but women themselves, would need to undertake extraordinary efforts to bridge this gap.

It is not true that we all have a level playing field. Moreover, development in our countries tends to focus on cities, and we forget about the countryside. Even when we eat, we never stop to think about the fact that someone had to grow that food.

Rural women’s needs are evident; however, their primary demand is to be recognized as producers, given the fact that they are generally thought of as assistants in production processes, even though they take on the most immediate responsibilities in the field.

As we strive to foster awareness of women’s important role, it is critical that women speak out. We must find a way to give them a voice, that is, to bring their reality to the foreground. Quite simply, it will not be considered a priority issue unless it is in the foreground.

As the current Vice President of the Republic and Minister of Foreign Affairs, I am occupied and preoccupied with the way in which women and major international agreements, such as the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda or others related to climate change, are articulated. Who does climate change affect the most, if not women living in the countryside? Who has greater needs in terms of the most basic aspects, such as health and education?

The commitments that countries assume at the international level must become a reality. Otherwise, women will be reduced to mere statistics: 5% or 20% of something, and no one will remember María, Juana, Sharon or all the other flesh and blood women, because they have been turned into figures.

With respect to public policy, the goal is to cast our eyes toward all those women who have a hard time reaching urban centers to claim their rights, because it is they who face the greatest difficulties; they are the poorest women, and they carry on their shoulders the weight of all the shortages in their communities. These women live in places that may lack roads, schools or clinics, and sometimes even water or electricity.

As the Minister of Foreign Affairs, I am proud to announce that one of the key elements of our foreign policy for the period 2018-2022 will be Social Inclusion,

Culture and Women's Economic and Political Empowerment. This is just one example of how a woman can take advantage of her position in the government to ensure that women are incorporated into the political agenda as a priority topic, not only to provide them with greater visibility, but also to search for resources, to reintroduce rural development as a critical issue, and to provide tools to all of the women who are fighting tooth and nail. We want to ensure that women are able to exercise political leadership and have a voice in decision-making platforms; when we hold a privileged position, our idea of reality can be very different from what actually occurs in the real world.

We have assumed this commitment; now let us materialize it through actions. Let us provide a platform for women's issues. We now face the challenges of democracy, development and inclusion as we work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

### **Empowering women**

It might sound overly simplistic to say that rural women should be empowered. What practical measures are we referring to? Empowering women is not a political act per se; it involves generating concrete actions that, for instance, would enable women to produce, sell their products or access credit opportunities.

It involves developing public policies that guarantee women's access to land ownership, and provides them with real assistance. If male producers face difficulties gaining access to credit, it is even harder for women. We must guarantee credit conditions that they would be able to meet.

It involves building markets where they can sell what they produce in exchange for a decent price.

It involves generating the conditions required to drive rural tourism, by providing women with decent housing for their families, in which they can also welcome visitors to share their culture, experiences and way of life.

It involves creating opportunities in political parties for women to share their unique perspective in local governments, town halls or municipalities.

It involves promoting care networks so that they are not the sole persons responsible for looking after their children, the ill or the elderly.

If we want to empower rural women, let us never forget them. Let us keep them in mind in everything that we do and promote, and consider the amount of resources from our budgets that actually reaches them. Only then can we truly say that we are committed to rural women.



# The Declaration on the Rights of Peasants to improve the situation of rural women across the globe

The objective of the Declaration is to help improve the living conditions of peasants and rural workers, women and young people

*María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés\**

One of the biggest challenges faced by the Member States of the United Nations has been that of working toward the achievement of the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. On assuming the presidency of the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, in September 2018, I established seven priorities for the year ahead, in line with the 2030 Agenda: decent work; persons with disabilities; environmental action; migration and refugees; gender equality; youth, peace, and security; and revitalization of the UN.

With this as our frame of reference, we are working towards the achievement of Sustainable No. 5, which calls for efforts to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.”

As the fourth woman to serve as the President of the General Assembly, one of the UN’s main organs, Development Goal I have dedicated my work to the women and girls of the world. Achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls will make a decisive contribution to the advancement of the 2030 Agenda, and act as a major catalyst to the efforts to guarantee the wellbeing of all people on a sustainable planet.

\* President of the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly

I believe that the General Assembly, the most democratic, representative organ of the UN and of the multilateral system, has a key role to play in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The main thrust of my efforts as President of the 73rd Session of the General Assembly is to bring the work of the UN closer to the people by implementing actions that demonstrate that multilateralism works and translates into positive actions for the global and local community.

To that end, I am working to promote the political leadership of women, and transforming social norms to expedite the empowerment of women. I am also focusing on the urgent need to put an end to violence against women and girls, and to provide access to quality education, especially for girls in vulnerable situations.

One of the groups facing the biggest difficulties in all parts of the world—discrimination, lack of access to land and basic services, and the evident failure to recognize their contribution—are rural women. And this even though they make up one quarter of the world’s population (nearly 1.9 billion women live in the countryside).<sup>1</sup>

Rural women guarantee that dwellings have water, look after water sources, grow most of our food, and work with small animals. They feed not only their families, but also their local communities.



*As the fourth woman to serve as the President of the General Assembly, I have dedicated my work to the women and girls of the world. Achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls will make a decisive contribution to the advancement of the 2030 Agenda, and act as a major catalyst to efforts to guarantee the wellbeing of all people on a sustainable planet.”*

The work they do makes a key contribution to the improvement of agricultural productivity and food security, which is vital to reduce poverty levels in their communities. Despite their enormous contribution, the work of most women is overlooked, undervalued and poorly paid. In developing countries, rural women make up nearly 43% of the agricultural workforce.

Were women in developing countries to enjoy the same access to productive resources as men, their farms would produce 20%-30% more. In terms of the sustainable development goals, improving women’s access to productive resources is essential to tackle hunger.

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<sup>1</sup> FAO (2011), The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011. Women in agriculture. Closing the gender gap for development.

Figures tell only part of the story, however; it is important to understand the everyday lives of rural women. During the preparations for the World Conference on Women in Beijing, I had the opportunity to work with rural women, particularly indigenous women in Ecuador's Amazon region, and was inspired to publish a paper about the experience.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, the UN conferences have provided timely opportunities to develop a complex network of actors and obtain input from the grassroots about women's needs and their bearing on the regional and international dialogue on indigenous women and sustainable development.

We addressed issues such as the need to guarantee the effective protection and use of women's knowledge and biodiversity technologies, promote research on the role, know-how and experience of women in food collection and production and land use. But perhaps the most important aspect for the women was the fact they viewed their traditions as strategic assets, to be used not only to solve specific health and nutrition problems, for example, but also to preserve nature and their culture.

At the meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2012, where the priority theme was rural women, the Member States failed to agree on a final document (agreed conclusions). But at that same meeting of ECOSOC's functional commission, we promoted a resolution presented by Ecuador with the support of other countries entitled "Indigenous women: key actors in poverty and hunger eradication." This very timely contribution also proved to be useful for subsequent efforts at the Rio+20 Conference.

Years later, in collaboration with the Network of Rural Women of Ecuador and the Network of Rural Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, we decided to work towards a Decade of Rural Women.

In all these experiences, one thing in particular stood out: the fact that rural women are key actors for reducing poverty and achieving food security. They are the driving force within rural communities. But they also have less access to goods, education and services of every kind.

It was an enormous privilege to chair the session in which we approved the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas,<sup>3</sup> in December 2018. The declaration is intended to guarantee the protection of the rights of all rural populations, including women and men peasants, small-scale fishers, nomads, agricultural workers, and indigenous populations, among others.

The objective of the declaration is to help improve the living conditions of peasants and workers in rural areas, and of women and young people. It is designed to

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2 Espinosa, María Fernanda. "Indigenous Women on Stage: Retracing the Beijing Conference from Below." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1997, pp. 237–255. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/3346977](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3346977). Consulted on 14 January 2019.

3 <https://undocs.org/en/A/C.3/73/L.30>.

facilitate action on behalf of a huge segment of the world's population affected by high levels of poverty and unmet basic needs; and, in the specific case of women, high levels of discrimination.

The approval of this declaration is also an important contribution to the international effort to promote family and peasant farming—for much of which women are responsible—and protect biodiversity. It also addresses the rights to health, education, drinking water, and housing, as well as financial services, technologies and environmental protection mechanisms.

This declaration must be promoted and implemented as an additional mechanism in the efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger in rural areas, and, of course, to reduce inequalities, which are priority goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier de Schutter, has noted that the declaration makes an enormous contribution to the wellbeing of peasants for at least four reasons. Its implementation will help protect small-scale, family-owned farms and allow peasants greater access to the means of production. It is a policy guide framed within international law, which also contributes to the recognition of both men and women peasants and farm workers.

Specifically, Article 4 of the Declaration refers to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against peasant women; the empowerment of women and their full enjoyment of human rights; the participation of women in the formulation and implementation of development planning at all levels; equal access to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; access to social security, education, economic opportunities, participation in all community activities; equal access to financial services, agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities and appropriate technology; equal access to land and natural resources; decent employment, equal remuneration and social protection benefits, and access to income-generating activities; and to be free from all forms of violence.

In particular, the Declaration recognizes the special relationship and interaction between peasants and other people working in rural areas and the land, water and nature to which they are attached and on which they depend for their livelihood. It also recognizes the contributions of peasants to development and to conserving and improving biodiversity, which constitute the basis of food and agricultural production throughout the world. Furthermore, it recognizes their contribution to ensuring the right to adequate food and food security, which are key to attaining the internationally agreed development goals, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Several regional and global peasant and women's organizations, as well as non-governmental organizations that have supported the process, have applauded the approval of the resolution, inasmuch as it recognizes the leading role played by men and women peasants in providing solutions to the many crises we face today with respect to food, the environment, and social and economic issues. However,



it is essential to move beyond the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants to achieve recognition of the contribution that rural women make to food security, economic and social progress, and biodiversity protection.

Furthermore, during the meeting held in March 2018, the Commission on the Status of Women finally approved the Declaration on challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls. In the document, the Commission finally urges the countries to strengthen their normative, legal and policy frameworks on rural women, as well as the collective voice and leadership of all rural women and girls and their participation in decision-making.

The Commission encourages the international community to enhance international cooperation and devote resources to developing rural and urban areas and sustainable agriculture and fisheries, and to supporting smallholder farmers, especially women farmers, herders and fishers in developing countries, particularly in the least developed countries.

I held a high-level event entitled Women in Power at the United Nations on 12 March 2019, to provide a special opportunity to promote the political participation of women, including, of course, rural women.

We have made progress, but much remains to be done to achieve gender equality, eradicate discrimination and violence against women, ensure a full life for rural women, develop public policies that improve their living conditions, and empower them, so they continue to contribute to the construction of a fairer world in which peace is the norm.



# How I learned to see agriculture (and everything else) as a gender issue

A successful farmer requires a lot of things — including good land, good seeds and animals, helping hands, tools, time and know-how — and most women farmers don't have equal access to any of them

*Melinda Gates\**

**I**t was some of the best advice I've ever received — but at the time, it caught me off-guard.

When our foundation was only a few years old, the former head of the World Food Programme told a colleague of mine, “If the foundation doesn't pay attention to the gender differences in agriculture, you will do what many others have done in the past, which is waste your money. The only difference will be you'll waste a lot more.”

Bill and I started our foundation to fight poverty and disease around the world. We invest in agriculture because roughly 75% of the world's poorest people live in rural areas, and the majority of them rely on agriculture or farming for their livelihoods. Making their farms more productive can help them eat more, earn more and live better lives.

I'm embarrassed to say it now, but at the time, I wasn't thinking much about gender inequalities in connection to our anti-poverty work. I definitely wasn't thinking about them in relation to agriculture. I bet if you'd asked me to close my eyes and picture one of the farmers we were trying to reach, I would've pictured a man.

\* Co-chair  
Bill & Melinda Gates  
Foundation

As it turns out, statistically speaking, at least half the time, I should've been picturing a woman — and often, a mother. It also turns out that, while making a living from a small family farm plot is hard for anyone, the data tells us that it's especially hard for women. A landmark 2011 study from the [UN's Food and Agriculture Organization](#) showed that women farmers in developing countries achieve 20% to 30% lower yields than men.

Why does this gender gap exist? It's not that men are inherently better farmers. It's that a successful farmer requires a lot of things — including good land, good seeds and animals, helping hands, tools, time and know-how — and most women farmers don't have equal access to any of them.

The barriers holding back women farmers take many forms. Some countries still have laws and customs that bar women from inheriting land. Cultural norms mean that women and men tend to grow different crops and raise different types of animals — and because agricultural research tends to focus on the high-margin crops that men grow, there's been less innovation in the lower-margin crops that women farm.

The list goes on. Women often have less decision-making power at home, including over the family budget, which makes it more difficult for them to invest in the supplies they need. Cultural norms also mean that women are never just farmers: They're expected to spend hours each day gathering water and wood, cooking and caretaking, which leaves them less time to do other things, including farm.



*The barriers holding back women farmers take many forms. Some countries still have laws and customs that bar women from inheriting land. Cultural norms mean that women and men tend to grow different crops and raise different types of animals — and because agricultural research tends to focus on the high-margin crops that men grow, there's been less innovation in the lower-margin crops that women farm.*

All of these learnings were a revelation for Bill and me. We'd started out thinking that better technology was the best way to help farmers increase their yields. But the potential for a farming revolution wasn't just in improving inputs like seeds; it was in the power of the women who plant them. Therefore, our efforts would need to put them at the center.

Since then, we've made a number of grants that are specifically designed to reflect the realities of women farmers' lives. For example, we helped one of our partners, Farm Radio International, create a radio program that taught women best practices for growing tomatoes. When creating the show, they

also made sure to research what time women tended to listen to the radio, recognizing that if they put the program on while men were home and controlling the dial, women weren't going to get the information they needed.

Another program we supported, Pathways, operated by our partner CARE, went a step further. It not only taught women how to be better farmers — it also taught their husbands to see their wives as equal partners. I travelled to Malawi to see this program in action and spent time with a farmer named Patricia. Patricia told me that the program had helped her gain access to new skills and seeds. She also told me about the impact it had on her marriage.

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After participating in a few gender equality exercises, Patricia's husband realized that by refusing to invest in her farm plot and loading her down with other household tasks, he'd been hurting her farm's potential and keeping her from earning more income. He vowed to change.

By the time I visited her village, Patricia had quadrupled her harvest and had plans to expand her farm even more. And while the new skills and seeds had certainly played a major role, so, too, she told me, did the fact she now had "a supportive husband."

Today when I close my eyes and picture a farmer, I picture Patricia — and I try to make sure that my colleagues do, too. Because once you have a better understanding of who's doing the farming, it's much easier to design solutions to help them succeed.

My new book, "The Moment of Lift," makes a case for prioritizing gender equality around the world. I believe that when we lift up women, we lift up humanity. And as Patricia's story demonstrates so powerfully, sometimes, all that's needed to lift women up is to stop pulling them down.



# New Zealand's Rural Women: Past, Present and Future

They are working together to unlock  
their potential and overcome the  
challenges of isolation

*Sarah Paterson\**

New Zealand is blessed with natural beauty and resources, making it a leading tourist destination and producer of some of the world's most sought-after food, beverages and fibres.<sup>1</sup>

Driving around the New Zealand countryside today, you will see many examples of thriving farming businesses, tourism ventures, local small businesses and communities. High-tech farming operations sit alongside vine-covered hillsides, plantation forest alongside vast tracts of native bush. The critical role of the primary sector and tourism to New Zealanders' economic, social and cultural wellbeing is plain to see.

But while our natural environment provides us with rich resources and stunning landscapes, the success of the primary sector and the resilience of our rural communities comes from our people.

*“He aha te mea nui o te ao, he tangata he tangata he tangata”.* This well-known Māori proverb says “What is the most important thing in the world; it is the people, the people, the people”.

**\* Agricultural  
specialist  
Leading expert  
in trade policy  
and stakeholder  
relations,  
New Zealand**

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<sup>1</sup> The insights and perspectives shared are the result of a series of interviews with leading rural women in New Zealand.

New Zealand's world leading agriculture sector is the result of generations of hard work and determination. It is built on the backs of both men and women.

In summarising the past, present and future of rural women in New Zealand, three key themes emerge: resilience, recognition and adaptation.

## Resilience

The story of women on the land and in rural communities in New Zealand is one of resilience.

New Zealand farms historically have been family farms, and that is still the case for many farming enterprises today.

For earlier generations of New Zealand farming women, life was incredibly tough, and women worked extremely hard.

Former New Zealand Prime Minister and head of the United Nations Development Programme, the Right Honourable Helen Clark, recalls her grandmothers being an integral part of the farm labour force, raising their families and having to be largely self-sufficient - they made everything they needed, including churning the butter.



*Women's participation and contribution to farming businesses and rural communities have far-reaching implications for food security, as well as for economic and social progress. New Zealand's experience is that women contribute significantly to the resilience of farms and local communities. Increasing recognition and valuing of their role, skills and experience is opening further opportunities for women to contribute. Continuing to remove barriers to their participation and supporting women to realise their full potential will be key to successfully adapting to future challenges and opportunities."*

At the same time, they were active in their communities and found ways to connect with other women for support and to share their experiences. One grandmother would ride her horse (usually with an infant as well) to meetings of the local Country Women's Institute.

There have been many examples in our history of rural women doing remarkable things to sustain their families, farm businesses and communities through tough times.

Women joining the 'land army', assisting on farms to keep food supply flowing during both world wars. Women sewing and maintaining gardens to keep the family and farm workers clothed



and fed. Women stepping up to run the farm in times of illness or the loss of a husband or partner, such as the woman who was in the shed for morning milking, when her husband had died of a heart attack in the night. Ask anyone in a rural community and you will hear many similar stories of resilience and determination.

While modern life has overcome many of the hardships women historically faced, farming today still requires great resilience to manage its ups and downs, including the vagaries of the weather, volatile prices and changing market or regulatory requirements.

Rural women have continued to be active in helping themselves, by establishing community organisations to support to rural families and communities, develop their skills and knowledge and overcome their social isolation.

Rural Women New Zealand is an organisation that provides friendship, support and learning opportunities for rural women. It began as the Women's Division of the Farmer's Union in 1925, in response to hardships facing many farm women, particular those in isolated areas, coping with loneliness and illness with little support.

Undoubtedly its founders would be proud to know that the organisation continues to this day. They would also be proud to know that in 2018, dairy farmer and industry leader Katie Milne was elected as the first female President of the modern successor of the Farmer's Union, Federated Farmers of New Zealand.

Increasingly, rural women are working together to unlock their potential and overcome the challenges of isolation. For example, the Agri-Women's Development Trust (AWDT), established in 2009, aims to equip and support women to generate economic, social and environmental progress in the primary sector and rural communities. AWDT develops programmes that give women the tools, knowledge and confidence to lead and contribute in new ways.

The Dairy Women's Network is another example of women farmers coming together. The Network of members and volunteers around the country aims to empower farm businesses through connections and knowledge.

## **Recognition**

At present, a key focus is on improving recognition and awareness of the contribution of rural women, including to the success of farming enterprises. Women have been at the heart of New Zealand's rural communities and fundamental to the success of our primary sector; however, traditional assumptions about the roles of men and women often mean the contribution of rural women to farming or production is underestimated or overlooked.

One example shared by Kimberly Crewther, Executive Director of the Dairy Companies Association of New Zealand, is the perception that the men are

‘the farmers’, while a woman on the farm is the ‘farmer’s wife’. However, in the three generations of dairy farmers in her family, women have been partners and played a crucial role in the business, with their own areas of expertise. Kimberly’s grandmother went from being a city girl to farming, as part of the land army keeping dairy farms running during the war (she married a farmer and continued to make a huge contribution to the running of the farm). Or Kimberly’s mother, who ran the farm’s herd genetic improvement programme, spent summers driving hay and silage contracting machinery, milked cows, did farm budgets and could be considered nothing less than a full partner in the business.

Attitudes towards the roles of both men and women on the farm are changing. There is greater awareness of the value of women’s contribution to the farming business, and acceptance of both men and women deviating from traditional roles. Increasingly, family farms are seen as a partnership when run by husband and wife teams.

Fulfilling women’s potential starts with women themselves learning to recognise and value their own skills and experience. Lindy Nelson, founder and Executive Director of the AWDT, has seen many examples where women who participate fully and contribute to the farming business and rural communities have made a huge impact. She has seen women contributing to strengthening the financial viability of farms and rural businesses, participating in major regional economic projects, helping to shape public policy and increasingly shaping business strategy through their involvement at the governance level.

The next generation of women are also developing new ways of doing things, such as mobilising collaborative efforts to drive specific change initiatives and projects in the community. There has been an increasing trend of older women in the sector drawing on their experience to lead major rural community projects and business initiatives. Women of all generations who are speaking up and taking on visible leadership roles are helping inspire and encourage others to do the same. There are also many examples of women leaders being developed by the rural sector, who go on to national leadership roles in government and industry as well as on the world stage.

More work is needed to normalize women’s leadership (so appointing a woman to a leadership role is no longer newsworthy!) and to recognize and value the skills and experience of rural women.

## **Adaptation**

Since the mid to late 20th century, the nature of farming in New Zealand has changed significantly, reflecting wider social, cultural, environmental, political and economic changes. For example, to compete on the world stage without subsidies or other safety nets, farming has had to become more of a commercial enterprise rather than a lifestyle.

While the evolution of farming has created many benefits, including strengthening the export competitiveness and sustainability of the primary sector, there is also potential for these changes to further isolate rural women both physically and socially.

The skills needed by people working on farms or in supporting services has also been changing over time, potentially raising barriers to women's participation where they are not easily able to access training or have the time or opportunity to gain qualifications required.

The compliance burden on farming has also changed significantly. This has had an impact on family farming, for example making it more difficult for children to be involved in the farm, or for other family members to contribute. Often the demands of farming mean it can be more difficult for women to maintain involvement in the community and their wider connections. Women have also begun to do more work outside the farm to supplement farm income.

Young Māori women being encouraged to take leadership in the farming governance roles for the first time, or returning to family or Iwi farming operations, also need support. Mavis Mullins, who over her career has run a successful shearing contracting company and is a leader in agriculture in New Zealand, has highlighted how important it is to help younger, highly qualified, professional Māori women to integrate into the primary sector environment to learn the language and systems around land-based activities.

Mavis also shared a great example where the melding of farming and professional skills has led to important innovation. A young woman, who was a trained physiotherapist, came to them and took a job as a wool-handler and learner shearer. She immediately identified the need to properly assess the physical demands of the various roles in the shearing shed, and developed tailored, pre-employment fitness and training programmes that enabled the workforce to be better prepared for their employment and minimize work injuries.

To adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing world, there are also opportunities for public policy to help strengthen the role that rural women can play in a number of key areas:

- digital connectivity,
- access to life-long learning opportunities,
- integrated approaches to regional development, and
- profiling successful rural women.

### ***Strengthening digital connectivity***

New information technology can also provide solutions to reduce isolation and enhance access to knowledge. However, while we increasingly live in a digital world, many rural women are still not able to connect to the internet.

Increasing connectivity is essential to provide women with the knowledge and tools they need, and where it is available, technology is proving to be transformational in terms of women's contributions and well-being.

The rise of e-commerce also has the potential to better connect rural women to the marketplace, while increased participation of women in agribusiness is providing more opportunity for women to be part of designing and developing our products and services of the future and shaping the stories to better connect farms to consumers.

### ***Access to lifelong learning***

The way we develop skills and knowledge in the future is likely to look very different. Existing training providers and institutions are exploring how to better support lifelong learning, such as greater use of online learning tools and development of micro-credentials. Rural women will need to have ready access to training and support to take up new technologies and participate in the digital economy, if they are to avoid creating new barriers to women's participation.

Governments can promote policy frameworks that support life-long learning and help to ensure that learning opportunities are accessible to rural women and meet their learning needs.

### ***Integrated approaches to regional development***

In New Zealand and elsewhere, there is an increasing focus on how to grow and sustain regions, as more and more people move to the cities. Investment in infrastructure and maintaining rural services (including for education and health) is essential to ensure that even the most remote communities are able to thrive.

Governments can help to ensure that opportunities for regional development are considered from multiple perspectives, and carefully consider the social and cultural impacts of proposed economic or environmental initiatives on local communities. They can also ensure that rural women are at the table, participating in the design and development of policies and programmes that affect them.

In many parts of the world women continue to face discrimination in terms of access to and ownership of land, to credit and training opportunities. There is evidence to show that if women had the same access to resources and education that men have, there would be significant increases in productivity and food

security. Continuing to work to eliminate gender-based discrimination is critical, as the consequences are costly for the women concerned, but also for the whole of society.

### ***Profiling successful rural women and role models***

The future success of the rural sector relies on increasing the participation of women and girls in agriculture and farming enterprises and the service sectors that support them, including in science, technology, business and marketing. There is a huge opportunity to inspire women through sharing the stories of others who have gone before them. Business, government and communities can work together to raise the profile of rural women's role and contribution.

### **Conclusion**

Women's participation and contribution to farming businesses and rural communities have far-reaching implications for food security, as well as economic and social progress. New Zealand's experience is that women contribute significantly to the resilience of farms and local communities. Increasing recognition and valuing of their role, skills and experience is opening up further opportunities for women to contribute. Continuing to remove barriers to their participation and supporting women to realise their full potential will be key to successfully adapting to future challenges and opportunities.



# A History of Effective and Affective Struggle for all Women's Rights

Open letter to rural women fighting for and dreaming of a better world

*Rita Teixeira\**

**M**y name is Rita Teixeira. I'm from the State of Pará, in northern Brazil, and my origins have always been linked to work in the fields and the countryside. I grew up with - and continue to grow with - agriculture. I've always sown and planted. I have achieved gains and aches and pains. The most literal of these aches is the one I feel in my back, due to my work (always heavy) in the fields, with my parents. But the pain from the lack of rights is always latent. That's why I take a deep breath and continue. I'm engaged in an effective and affective struggle.

I am responding to an invitation from the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) in the form of an open letter, and I do so with affection and hope. I summarize a long history of twenty years in the Women's Movement of Northeast Para (MMNEPA). I, Rita, devote my days and nights and dedicate my life to achieving a just and egalitarian society, where women have rights (such as access to health care and recognition of their traditional knowledge), and policies to guarantee their physical, moral and civil integrity, along with access to land, water and an abundant life.

*\* Movimento de Mulheres do Nordeste Paraense – MMNEPA (Women's Movement of Northeast Para) Pará, Brazil*

I fight not only because I was born and raised in an environment of hardship. I do so because conformism is not a part of me, and because I cannot (and do not wish to) silence my inner voice... My voice, after all, resounds in many women. In all rural women who feel in their skin what I feel, and in all non-rural, urban women who, thanks to empathy –that very female ability - can put themselves in our place and embrace our struggle. Women’s unity is fundamental.

And so, together with women of different ages and with specialized institutions, I’m committed to transforming our reality. I dream of restructuring the patriarchal society which, I believe, is even more violent and unfair in the region where I live.

### **A tool for achieving autonomy**

Violence, urgency and injustice. Transformation, rights, dedication. These half dozen words are among the most common in my speech and in my life. They’re in my discourse, and that of my colleagues, in our hearts, in our dreams and in our routines. They’re derived from pain and the will to change and prosper, nourishing our hopes, the certainty that it is possible. Because yes we can! We know that we have the right and will never tire of searching and trying out tools to achieve our freedom and prosperity. There are many roads; here I describe just one of them.

The agroecology primer (*cartilla agroecológica*) is a practical example of an opportunity for development. Apparently, it’s something very simple: a notebook for planning, organizing and monitoring a family farmer’s time, investment and financial profits.

But it is much more than that: it is a political and educational tool that encourages women farmers to claim their visibility, their strength and their autonomy.

This joint project of the Women’s Work Group of the National Agroecology Alliance (ANA), with the Center for Alternative Technologies and the Federal University of Viçosa (in Minas Gerais), has the backing of Brazil’s Special Secretariat for Family Farming and Agrarian Development (SEAD).

This instrument was created after a year of field studies in the area of Mata Mineira, confirming the power and strength of women’s production in the so-called family



*I fight not only because I was born and raised in an environment of hardship. I do so because conformism is not a part of me, and because I cannot (and do not wish to) silence my inner voice... My voice, after all, resounds in many women. In all rural women who feel in their skin what I feel, and in all non-rural, urban women who, thanks to empathy –that very female ability - can put themselves in our place and embrace our struggle. Women’s unity is fundamental.”*



agriculture sector. In other words, it is a tool derived from women's leadership in Brazil's agro-ecological farms, for the women of Brazil's agro-ecological sectors.

It is a notebook, but it is also a mirror in which women can see themselves as they are: powerful. And they can recognize themselves as such- powerful – in order to live that way.

The notebooks are currently used in all five regions of Brazil (North, Northeast, Center-West, Southeast and South), and therefore in all the Amazon states. Their use is monitored and encouraged, together with the exchange of knowledge and experiences among the women who use this tool.

A total of 1,000 women are participating in this initiative. They no longer consider themselves as their husbands' "helpers", but as protagonists who are deserving of their rights. Thanks to the notebooks, it has been proven that women's output is almost double that of men. But there is more: the "*libreta*" suggests options to women farmers for signing or not signing new contracts, or analyzing the seasonality of crops, which are changing as a result of climate change.

It is important to emphasize that the notebooks not only improve women's self-esteem at work, but also in the personal sphere. The social emancipation of those who have adhered to this formula is evident.

### **Emancipated colleagues**

In a very special way, I recall the story of Doña Nega, a colleague from the village of Careiro Castanho, in the State of Amazonas. This 49 year-old woman has made a new life for herself, using the tip of her pencil, the pages of her notebook and her hoe. She discovered a strong woman within herself and gained knowledge through her own experiences. The result was emancipation.

Doña Nega frequently attends workshops at *Casa del Río*, a philanthropic organization in the state of Amazonas that promotes the use of the agro-ecological primer, or textbook. Doña Nega and her notebook are companions. Every day, she records her achievements in her notebook and in her personal life. Every day, she plans, dreams, builds her self-esteem and develops her knowledge. In fact, the notebook methodology encourages an appreciation of the "natural" or "ancestral" knowledge, thereby giving women even more encouragement and confidence so that they can make agriculture (and life) evolve toward a more careful approach, without violence toward the Earth, for themselves, for the environment and for humankind. It all has to do with cycles, with unity and with nutrition and health, in their broadest (and feminine) sense.

I also remember Benedita, known as Bena in the community of Igarapé Merim. She is a very powerful and successful woman, a woman of struggle. She is a community leader, a referent and an inspiration in her municipality. After using the notebook, this farmer not only dramatically increased her production but also her marketing. She sells her produce at home, from door to door and also at fairs. She is tireless, admirable and tries

to share her knowledge and involve other women in the struggle for greater autonomy and emancipation.

I couldn't speak about inspiring women without mentioning and paying tribute to Regiane Guimarães, a farmer and rural leader who was murdered in 1996. Undoubtedly, she was our greatest loss and the greatest sorrow of our struggle. A man executed her and was then killed by the police. Violence followed violence, while the crime bosses still remain unpunished. More than twenty years have passed, and everyone knows who they are. And we all know that they want exactly the opposite of what we want. We want our value and our potential to be recognized, and our rights to be recognized.

That is why we join together. During meetings it's very clear that unity is synonymous with power. If I'm now a social assistant, active, with a diploma, it's because I had the support of many women who believed (and still believe) in me, and therefore made me believe in my own potential. Among my personal achievements, my diploma is the most valuable. And it's not just mine, but belongs to all of us. That's the importance of meeting face to face and exchanging experiences. Sitting in a circle we share our concerns and knowledge, we give ourselves to each other. I repeat, it's an affective and effective process.

Our circles, our meetings, are mirrors. A way of seeing each other, of existing, evolving.

Women's capacity for mobilization and organization has no limits. And –look – it's about organization, struggle, unity. It's about pain and achievement. Agroecology is also a woman, it is female. And in these regions agroecology, which is so popular, is no longer a novelty, but the only reality. Yes, and this time we have success. Now, imagine how much greater that success could be if we had public policies to support and increase development and training projects. Imagine!

It's good to dream and take action in order to transform. Our notebooks enjoy the support of initiatives such as the PAA (Food Procurement Program) and the PNAE (National School Feeding Program). They help us market the products with fair prices. Just two sources of support. Can you imagine if there were 20, 200 or 2,000? Brazil is huge.

Other initiatives are also essential in this battle, such as ANA (National Agroecology Alliance) and RMERA (Network of Women Entrepreneurs of Amazonia). Yes, I say battle. Because it's not easy to have a voice, much less to make ourselves heard. We women understand that dialogue (having a voice, making yourself heard, listening and doing) is the way forward. And that is simply why I'm here, with my words and the struggle and dreams of all my colleagues, and of all their descendants and ancestors.

### **Daring to dream**

Clearly, imagination forms part of the plan and the dream. Therefore, once again, I extend an invitation: imagine a different reality, with these words (and realities) that I've written about (and repeated) here. I refer to transformation, to rights, to dedication.

Simply include them in your thoughts. Into this scenario, add water, land, health, security. Women politicians and women in politics (because there's a clear difference). Imagine Regiane alive, Doña Bene even more prosperous, and Doña Nega with even greater autonomy. The present would be richer for us all. And, as part of this exercise, think of the present and the future without this transformation we seek, without the fruits of our struggle. Think of us, rural women, think of yourself. At your table, in your food, in what nourishes you, in what nourishes us. It's not an easy scenario, is it? I know.

I don't know whether you sensed it from my voice or my way of writing .... I am a poor, black woman. Very often I receive negative comments, I face prejudice daily and I have to overcome adversity. I'm the youngest daughter of Doña Perpetua and Mr. Teixeira, farmers who are now 78 years old. At the beginning of this letter, I mentioned that we live from planting and harvesting (fruits, knowledge, know-how, experiences, etc.). I began early in life, helping my parents and then the women of northeast Pará filled me with energy, especially Doña Francisca, or simply *Francica*, my beloved teacher and lifelong friend.

Farming always demands many hours of daily work, and it was no different in my family. I remember very clearly when we planted cassava to make flour, as well as watermelons, guavas and pepper. Work began at seven in the morning and ended at around five in the afternoon, with a maximum of two hours of rest. My brothers and I always helped my parents, hauling the produce all the way to a vehicle which, due to lack of access and good roads, could not reach our home. I also did various other jobs in the fields.

From very early on I understood the wealth and hardships of the countryside. I realized that our power, our value was not recognized, that rural women were strong, but were not seen. I'm a rural woman and, if I appear in the mirrors mentioned here, if I appear in the mirror of my house, if I reflect my companions and they are reflected in me, that proves that I'm not invisible. For example, you can see me. You are seeing me through this text, through my words. You can see me and all rural women. You can hear us, you are hearing us.

Thank you for listening to me. And I wait for an answer. I want – we want, we need to talk. But please, not over the Internet, because access to communications is very lacking around here, as is access to water, land and to women's rights ...

I invite you then to join in that transformation. My call is for an ideal world, my struggle, our struggle, is also for that goal. A world with food free from agro-toxins, inequalities, violence, injustice. This has to do with me, a woman born and raised in the countryside for the countryside, with them, my colleagues and with you. With everyone. It may seem far off. But it's not. Believe! We believe.

Thank you very much.

**Rita Teixeira**

Aged 48

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Warriors  
Rural Women Around the World  
Grupo Nación  
San Jose, Costa Rica  
September 2019

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