

**Inputs to the draft Agreed Conclusions
by IT for Change on:**

**Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the
empowerment of rural women and girls**

The Secretary General's report on the review theme notes that the 'landscape of gender equality and empowerment' has considerably been altered by the digital revolution.¹ From the development of policies, design of cities, to the future of work and livelihoods and access to entitlements the touch of the digital is increasingly obvious. A women's empowerment agenda that fails to acknowledge this will not have longevity. Deliberate choices need to be made to mainstream gender into the digital norms-making process, without which women and girls especially those from vulnerable communities, will be coded out of the benefits that accrue from technology.

The objective of this input is to recognise the place of ICTs in rural women's empowerment. We would also like to bring out the underlying relationship between the priority theme '*challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls*' and the review theme '*participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women*'.

All **new text** suggested are in **red coloured** font. Where substantive additions have been made, the accompanying **rationale** is provided in **blue coloured** font. Text that is suggested to be removed is highlighted as **'strike-through'**

Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-second session
12 - 23 March 2018

**Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the
empowerment of rural women and girls Draft agreed conclusions**

1. The Commission on the Status of Women reaffirms the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and the declarations adopted by the Commission on the occasion of the tenth, fifteenth and twentieth anniversaries of the Fourth World Conference on Women. (CSW 61 AC, para 1)

2. The Commission reiterates that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Optional Protocols thereto, as well as other relevant conventions and treaties, such

1 E/CN.6/2018/4 para 6, <http://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2018/4>

as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, provide an international legal framework and a comprehensive set of measures for realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all women and girls, including rural women and girls, throughout their life cycle. (Based on CSW 61 AC, para 2)

3. The Commission reaffirms that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome documents of its reviews, and the outcomes of relevant major United Nations conferences and summits and the follow-up to those conferences and summits, have laid a solid foundation for sustainable development and that the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action will make a crucial contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls. (Based on CSW61, para 4)

4. The Commission emphasizes the mutually reinforcing relationship among the empowerment of rural women and girls and the realization of their human rights and gender equality and the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. (Based on CSW61 AC, para 6 and E/CN.6/2018/3, para 2)

5. The Commission acknowledges that rural women and girls face multiple and intersecting inequalities and forms of discrimination as young women and girls, older women, heads of households, indigenous women, women affected by HIV/AIDS, women with disabilities and migrants, refugees and internally-displaced persons. It also acknowledges that different groups of rural women and girls have particular needs and priorities, warranting tailored policy and institutional responses. (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, para 6)

6. The Commission stresses the urgency of eliminating structural barriers and discriminatory laws and policies, gender stereotypes and negative social norms to enable rural women and girls to respond to challenges and seize opportunities for change. (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, para 44)

7. The Commission stresses the urgency of eradicating poverty and fulfilling the rights of rural women and girls to an adequate standard of living, to a life free of violence and harmful practices, to land and productive assets, food security and nutrition, decent work, education and health, inclusive of sexual

and reproductive health and rights. (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, paras 3 and 43)

8. The Commission also stresses the importance of rural women's voice, agency and leadership and their full, equal and effective participation at all levels of decision-making. (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, including paras 6, 13, 23)

9. The Commission expresses its concern especially about the continuing impacts of the financial, food and climate crises, compounded by slow or stagnant economic growth, worsening political and humanitarian conflicts, environmental degradation, and unsustainable agricultural and land use practices, and the dynamics of migration and urbanization, on the lives, livelihoods, and wellbeing of rural women and girls. (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, paras 9, 28)

10. The Commission affirms that the acceleration in the provision of essential services and infrastructure, sustainable energy, sustainable transport, safely managed water and sanitation, and **affordable and accessible** information and communications technology (ICT), including through appropriate **and accountable** technology transfer; care, education and health, including sexual and reproductive health, and prevention and response to violence against women and girls; and universal social protection is vital for rural women and girls to realize fully their human rights and empowerment. (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, paras 7, 14, 17, 40, 44)

Rationale:

1) The need to invest in affordable and accessible information and communication technology is well-acknowledged in global development debates. For instance, see Para 22 of the WSIS Declaration of Principles: *A well-developed information and communication network infrastructure and applications, adapted to regional, national and local conditions, easily-accessible and affordable, and making greater use of broadband and other innovative technologies where possible, can accelerate the social and economic progress of countries, and the well-being of all individuals, communities and peoples.*

2) In the 21st century, many times, technological transfers concern the role of data and digital intelligence across diverse sectors – from precision agriculture to geo-spatial information about soil and seeds. In other instances, developed countries may also provide support for ICT-enabled public services in education, health care etc. The possibility of data extraction accompanying these 'transfers' needs to be recognised as a risk to the individual privacy of women, especially when it concerns intimate information about their bodies .

11. The Commission reaffirms the need for greater financing from all sources, including increased official development assistance, in order to leave no rural woman or girl behind. (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, para 43)

12. The Commission, in order to continue working towards the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which will make a crucial contribution to the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda, urges Governments, the relevant entities of the United Nations system and international and regional organizations, and invites national human rights institutions where they exist, nongovernmental, women's and other civil society and community-based organizations, and especially rural women's civil society organizations and cooperatives, feminist groups, youth-led organizations, faith-based organizations, the private sector, employer organizations, trade unions, the media and other relevant actors, as applicable, to take the following actions: (Drawing on CSW AC 60, 61, and E/CN.6/2018/3)

Strengthen normative and legal frameworks and eliminate laws and policies that discriminate against rural women and girls

(a) Take action on existing commitments and obligations with respect to the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls and their full enjoyment of all their human rights, which constitute an integrated framework that leaves no rural women or girls behind; (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (a))

(b) Strengthen and enforce laws, policies and regulations that prohibit discrimination against rural women and girls; and enhance gender-responsive rural development policies; (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (b))

(c) Implement targeted measures to address the multiple and intersecting inequalities and marginalization rural women and girls face as young women and girls, older women, heads of households, indigenous women, women affected by HIV/AIDS, women with disabilities and migrants, refugees and internally-displaced persons; (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (b))

(d) Accelerate efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence and harmful practices against rural women and girls, such as intimate partner violence, domestic violence and sexual violence, **including gender-based cyber violence**, as well as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation; (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (c))

Rationale:

World over, women's participation online has been stymied by norms that allow cultures of gendered violence to perpetuate offline and online. A report by the UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development disclosed that a staggering 73% of women across the world have already faced cyber violence.² Unfortunately, in most countries, institutional actors have not taken due cognisance of the prevalence of gender-based cyber violence. Law enforcement and courts in 74% of the 86 countries covered by the Web Index fail 'to take appropriate actions in situations where Web-enabled ICTs are used to commit acts of gender-based violence.'³ This phenomenon demands immediate attention from states.

(e) Undertake legislative and administrative reforms to protect and promote the right of rural women and girls to land and land tenure security and ensure their equal access to and control over productive resources and assets, other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, ~~and~~ financial services and technology, **in particular ICT**; (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (d))

(f) Ensure the full and equal participation and leadership of rural women and girls in rural development and governance, including in decision-making at all levels; (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (e))

(g) Upgrade legislative mechanisms to address dis-information and propaganda, safeguard media diversity, ensure media transparency and accountability, and promote rural women's participation in, and ownership of, media. (Based on CSW 47 AC, para4(m), (n), (p))

Rationale:

In many countries, the Internet is slowly becoming the primary source through which news is accessed.⁴ Editorial policies are now contained in algorithms that determine what is accessible and hence consumed. With the replacement of human discretion by code, dis-information or fake news has grown, polluting the public-media space. The network logic of Internet fueled virality amplifies already dominant voices, muffling that of the marginalised. Thus, news that reflect the realities of rural women and girls will hardly ever go viral, and become mainstream.⁵ This paradigm of news dissemination has pushed the kill switch on media pluralism.

Accountability and transparency measures adequate to the digital need to be instituted and enforced by the state. One such measure is algorithmic accountability to weed out bias and discrimination. The EU has taken a progressive step in this regard. The General Data Protection Regulation, which

2 http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/cyber_violence_gender%20report.pdf?v=1&d=20150924T154259

3 http://thewebindex.org/report/#4.2_gender-based_violence_online

4 From 2014 to 2015, the share of print circulation of newspapers shrank 13 percent in Brazil.

<https://knightcenter.utexas.edu/blog/00-17765-brazilian-newspapers-have-broken-audience-records-and-digital-subscriptions-have-incre>.

5 <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1704.00139.pdf>

will be enforceable from May this year, ‘lays the groundwork for implementing algorithm audits, third-party inspections of algorithms aimed at discovering and reducing discriminatory effects’⁶.

The benefits of the digital are not automatic or evenly spread, and the gender digital divide to access is still a major problem only exacerbated by location.⁷ Hence, states must facilitate rural women’s participation in, and ownership of, media through measures like promoting public interest content production online by women’s groups, encouraging local language content creation, instituting appropriate policies for subsidised broadband connectivity, and so on.

~~(g)~~**(h)** Strengthen coordination between national gender equality mechanisms and other governmental institutions and collaboration with non-governmental and civil society organizations; (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (e))

~~(h)~~**(i)** Promote access by rural women and girls to justice, legal remedies and legal support; (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (f))

Implement economic and social policies for the empowerment of rural women and girls

(i) Pursue macroeconomic policies that support smallholder agricultural production and the food security and nutrition of rural women and girls and their communities by mitigating the negative impact of international investment and trade rules; (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (g))

(j) Enact economic and social policies to eradicate rural poverty and support rural women’s decent work and income security, climate-resilient agricultural production and food security and nutrition; (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (h))

(k) Design and implement fiscal policies that promote gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls; (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (i))

(l) Invest in essential infrastructure, **affordable and accessible** ICT, **data for development**, sustainable energy, sustainable transport and safely managed water and sanitation, including through appropriate **and accountable** technology transfer, to improve the lives, livelihoods and wellbeing of all rural women and girls; (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (i) and 44)

Rationale:

As the new oil, data is increasingly being recognised as an important digital infrastructure.

⁶ <http://www.mlandthelaw.org/papers/goodman1.pdf>

⁷ <http://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2018/4>

(m) Invest in services for care, education, and health, inclusive of sexual and reproductive health, and prevention and response to violence against women to improve the lives, livelihoods and wellbeing of all rural women and girls; (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (i) and 44)

(n) Reprioritize fiscal expenditures to extend social protection coverage to all rural women and girls and establish social protection floors to ensure access to social protection for all; (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (j))

(o) Ensure the right to work and rights at work of all rural women in the informal and formal economies, and that all rural women workers are equally protected by international labour standards and national labour laws; (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (k))

(p) Implement and enforce laws and regulations that uphold the principle of equal pay for work of equal value in agricultural and non-agricultural employment in rural areas; (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (l)) (q) Eliminate policies and practices that condone forced labour, trafficked labour and child labour in rural areas; (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (m))

(r) Undertake targeted measures to recognize and measure unpaid work performed by rural women and girls and reduce and redistribute their disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work through the equal sharing of responsibilities with rural men and boys and the provision of infrastructure, such as sustainable energy, sustainable transport and safely managed water and sanitation, **affordable and accessible** technology and public services, including accessible and quality childcare and care facilities for other dependents; (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (n))

(s) Systematically measure and incorporate the value of unpaid work performed by rural women and girls, including unpaid care and domestic work, in the calculation of gross domestic product and the formulation of economic and social policies; (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (o))

(t) Facilitate the entry of rural women, especially young women, into **formal, capital enhancing and advanced sectors of the economy** ~~the labour force~~ by improving their skills, including their financial and digital literacy; (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (p))

Rationale

For women in the informal, unorganised sector, automation has heightened precarity of work. Acquisition of digital skills alone will not ensure job security- if the job can easily be taken up by a machine. The World Economic Forum ‘estimates that 57% of the jobs set to be displaced by technology between now and 2026 belong to women’.⁸ Disposable human-labour, coupled with investment in robotics has encouraged reshoring of manufacturing jobs from the global South to the North.⁹ Unless women’s jobs are formalized, digital enskillment will have minimal impact.

(u) Increase the share of trade and procurement from rural women’s enterprises and cooperatives, and foster their access to local, national and international markets; (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (q))

(v) Strengthen the capacity of rural women and girls to respond to economic, political and social shocks, conflicts and humanitarian crises by providing essential infrastructure, services, decent work and social protection; (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (r))

(w) Build the resilience of rural women and girls to climate change and environmental degradation, such as deforestation, desertification and loss of agricultural biodiversity, by strengthening access to financing, sustainable energy and other technologies, information and social protection; (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (s))

(x) Increase financial investments in quality, affordable and accessible health-care facilities and support services for rural women and girls; (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (t))

(y) Take measures to reduce maternal mortality rates in rural areas and increase access to quality care before, during and after childbirth; and provide comprehensive sexuality education; (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (t))

(z) Ensure universal access by rural women and girls to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, including health-care services for family planning, and fulfil their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality free of coercion, discrimination and violence; (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (u))

(aa) Strengthen HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care in rural areas, including health and social services for rural women and girls; (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (v))

8 https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2018/jan/21/technology-widen-pay-gap-hit-womens-jobs-hardest-davos-report?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Gmail

9 <http://www.machinedesign.com/industrial-automation/reshoring-boost-american-manufacturing>

(bb) Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure the full and equal participation of rural women and girls in and their completion of quality education at primary, secondary, vocational and technical level, expand the scope of ICT-enabled mobile learning and literacy training and provide good school infrastructure and quality teachers in rural areas; (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (w))

(cc) Increase the capacity of national statistical offices and other relevant institutions to collect, analyse and disseminate sex- and age-disaggregated data and produce gender statistics to support policies and action for rural women and girls and to monitor and track progress towards the Goals; (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (x))

Strengthen the collective voice, leadership and decision-making of rural women and girls

(dd) Ensure that rural women and girls and their organizations fully and actively participate in the decisions, policies and institutions that affect their livelihoods, well-being and resilience; (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (y))

(ee) Protect the rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining to enable rural women workers, including informal and migrant workers, to organize and join unions and participate in economic decision-making and policy formulation; (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (z))

(ff) Support the effective participation, decision-making and leadership of rural women in women's enterprises, farmers' organizations, producer cooperatives and other civil society organizations; (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (aa))

(gg) Provide opportunities for rural girls and young women to form their own organizations to exercise voice, agency and leadership. (E/CN.6/2018/3, para 45 (bb)) 13. The Commission encourages men and boys to take an active part in, and to engage fully as agents and beneficiaries of change in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls. (Based on CSW61 AC, para 12)

(hh) Promote the right to freedom of expression and access to meaningful information for rural women and girls, including through digital media and technologies to expand their self expression and informed choices. ([Based on CSW 47 AC, para 2](#))

Rationale:

Women's efforts to assert their voice – to collectively bargain for better work conditions, highlight instances of discrimination, visiblise local issues through community media initiatives, and demand accountability from, and participate in, political structures – are all predicated on the state's guarantee of freedom of expression. Article 19 of the UDHR not only speaks of the freedom of speech and expression, but also the necessary corollary – the right to receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. The Internet has given new life to these rights. For rural women, the Internet has the potential to lower the barriers of access, enabling a wider reach to audiences and means to build solidarity across geographies. The Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression notes, 'The Internet has profound value for freedom of opinion and expression, as it magnifies the voice and multiplies the information within reach of everyone who has access to it. Within a brief period, it has become the central global public forum'.¹⁰

14. The Commission calls upon all Governments to ensure that national planning, decisionmaking, policy formulation and implementation, budgeting processes and institutional structures contribute to achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls, recognizing that this requires both targeted action and mainstreaming gender perspectives into all efforts. (Based on CSW61 AC, para 42, and 2017 HLPF MD, para 17)

15. The Commission calls upon the United Nations system, and especially the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the World Food Programme within their respective mandates, and other international organizations, including international financial institutions, to work collaboratively to support the implementation, measurement and monitoring of the present Agreed Conclusions and of the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda. (Based on E/CN.6/2018/3, para 46)

16. The Commission calls upon UN-Women to continue to play a central role in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and in supporting Governments and national women's machineries, upon their request, in coordinating the United Nations system and in mobilizing civil society, the private sector, employers' organizations and trade unions and other relevant stakeholders, at all levels, in support of the full, effective and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda. (Based on CSW61 AC, para 45)

10 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G15/095/85/PDF/G1509585.pdf?OpenElement>