



FAO's comments on the Beijing+20 Regional Review Meeting 6-7 November 2014

The particular challenges for rural women

FAO endorses the conclusions reached at the conference including both the long term trends concerning gender inequalities and the main challenges identified for the future. FAO notes, however, that it is necessary to add to these conclusions the long term trends and specific challenges regarding gender inequalities in rural areas, being necessary to differentiate between rural and urban realities.

During the discussions at the Beijing+20 Regional Review Meeting the gap between legislation and implementation was emphasized in several occasions. FAO's experience in the region demonstrates that this gap is much worse and more persistent in rural areas, in which social protection services, proper infrastructure and law enforcement are weaker and more spotty compared to urban settings.

The negative effects of limited social services and proper infrastructure, such as kindergartens, schools, running water, electricity and transportation, tend to be much more severe on women. Their usually heavy workload is increased and their mobility outside their households and farms is generally reduced, limiting their access to remunerated activities, entrepreneurship and markets. Rural women tend also to have less access to empowerment programs, gender based violence protection services and women's associations compared to urban women. The reduced social mobilization registered in ex-Soviet countries hardens the situation.

The FAO Regional and Sub-Regional Offices for Europe and Central Asia have produced Country Gender Assessments in Eastern European and Central Asian Countries (already conducted in Albania, Armenia, Georgia, Turkey, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and to be finished in Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan). These assessments have been focused on the specific situation of women in rural areas and have allowed the identification of key gender inequality issues in rural settings:

1. Women's limited access to land ownership and financial services

National laws recognize the equal right to land to both men and women, but social practices and regulations impede that women enjoy *de facto* legal control over land. Although figures vary from country to country in the region, in all of them registration is traditionally made by the head of the household, who is usually the husband. In many of the studied countries, marriage practices in rural areas are patrilocal, so wives tend to move to their husband's home when married, losing access to land inheritance from their parents and lacking possession of the properties of their new families. This fact might leave women unprotected in the event of divorce or widowhood. If they are not registered as owners they may also lack access to extension services and other benefits that are directed towards the head of the household.

Other consequences of no co-registering properties are that women are less visible in statistics and women's access to credit and financial services is restricted (when a property is needed as endorsement). Land registration, access to credit, participation in decision-making processes and women's entrepreneurship are interlinked.



2. Women's limited access to markets, decision making processes, entrepreneurship and agricultural inputs

The most common barriers identified that hinders women's satisfactory access to markets, entrepreneurship, agricultural inputs and decision-making are the abovementioned limited property rights, weak access to financial services and poor infrastructure. Particular barriers in each country also apply. For example, in the specific case of Tajikistan, the prevalence of Gender Based Violence against unaccompanied women in the markets was identified as a significant hurdle for female farmers.

3. Gender differences in rural employment

Many rural women workers are unpaid family workers or self-employed and perform most unpaid household services and volunteer work. These activities are a heavy workload for women, but none of them are included in employment statistics. When there is a lack of running water, electricity supplies and proper infrastructure, the time that women spend in reproductive activities increases. In some countries, especially in Turkey, the overrepresentation of women in rural seasonal jobs is also identified as an issue to address.

4. Challenges in implementing national gender equality strategies and gender blindness of national agriculture strategies

In many countries covered by the Country Gender Assessments, national strategies on gender equality have been established. As it has been noted by the Beijing+20 Regional Review, the effective implementation of them is not taking place though. This situation is worse in rural areas and some of the challenges that have been identified are: The lack of gender training of civil servants and providers of extension services; the lack of a genuine interest of civil servants to implement laws on gender equality (including the lack of law enforcement); and social resistances, especially present in rural communities. Two major issues that needs to be addressed at the Policy Level are: 1) National gender strategies usually do not cover agriculture and rural areas; and 2) National agriculture strategies usually are not gender sensitive.

5. Limited sex-disaggregated data for rural areas

As aforementioned, women's prevalence in the informal economy and non-remunerated jobs, and their limited access to ownership make them partly invisible in national statistics. Sex-disaggregated data is rarely cross-tabulated by rural-urban areas and therefore the actual gender gap in rural areas remains partly hidden.

6. Domestic violence is in many cases socially tolerated

According to the results of the Country Gender Assessments (CGAs), domestic violence is socially tolerated in many countries, especially in rural areas, where violence is especially underreported and where there is a limited access to social protection services. Tajikistan's CGA, for example, evidenced that around 50% of female respondents reported to have suffered



physical and verbal violence from husbands, other family members and from strangers (mainly in marketplaces). According to the CGA of Albania, the Kanun code –Albanian’s customary law– makes domestic violence tolerable, and nearly 30% of the respondent women of the 2008 Albanian Demographic and Health Survey agreed in at least one out of five 'reasons' presented in the survey for a man to justifiably beat his wife. Since the Kanun code is more extended in rural areas, the situation might be presumably worse in there, if investigated in detail.

More studies are needed to better understand the situation of rural women, their specific needs and challenges. What is clear now, though, is that a especial pathway towards gender equality needs to be tailored to shape the common challenges that rural women in Europe and Central Asia are facing.