

WHERE WE STAND**RURAL WOMEN****Where Things Stand...**

The situation of women in rural areas is challenging. Rural women and girls suffer disproportionately from gender-based discrimination, they face greater pressure than their urban peers to adhere to traditional practices and customs. Their opportunities are limited by the broader development context and by specific local factors, such as isolation and remoteness.

Poverty. Gender inequality is a major cause and effect of hunger and poverty. It is estimated that 60% of chronically hungry people are [women and girls](#). [80% of the world's poor](#) live in rural areas and work mainly in farming, often family/subsistence. Women living in rural areas suffer disproportionately from poverty, far worse than rural men or those living in cities.

Agriculture. On average, women make up about 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries. If women had the same access to productive resources as men, for example land, livestock and mechanical equipment, they could increase yields on their farms by 20% to 30%, raising total agricultural output in these countries by 2.5 to 4%. This would reduce the number of hungry people in the world by [around 12 to 17%](#).

Water and sanitation. Women in sub-Saharan Africa collectively spend about [40 billion hours a year](#) collecting water. This negatively impacts women's employment and girl's educational opportunities. There is still far less access to clean or improved water sources in rural areas than in urban areas.

Education. Rural girls are more likely to be out of school than those who live in urban areas. Lack of education can lead to limited access to employment and income, as well as exclusion from political and civic leadership, leaving women and girls behind. Girls forced into early marriage may not have access to continuing education; if secondary education is available to girls, they may regularly be missing it due to lack of adequate toilet facilities or taboos around menstruation.

Natural disasters, climate change, and conflict. Rural women's health, education and livelihoods can be undermined by natural disasters, climate change, and conflict more so than men. Land titles are more likely to be held by men. This means that following a disaster, if a woman is widowed, she cannot independently claim state-offered reconstruction funds. Women can also be more at risk from natural disasters and flooding, as often boys and not girls are taught to swim at an early age.

And Where Things Need to Go....**Fundamental Action**

To empower rural women and girls, action must be taken by States, the private sector and civil society. Together we must ensure that all human rights are realised, including the equal involvement of women and girls in the economic, social, cultural, and political development of communities.

All member States must fully implement previous human rights agreements and comply with the requirements of CEDAW.

To achieve the SDGs that support rural women and girls, States must first improve national statistical offices and other relevant parties to properly collect, analyse, and disseminate sex and age disaggregated data. In doing so, States can then produce gender statistics throughout all censuses that

will better enable them to implement and monitor policies designed to aid rural women and girls. Furthermore, States must recognise the value of data available from civil society.

Additional Action

Policies and programmes should take a life-course approach to education and employment for rural women and girls, recognising and understanding that access to learning is a human right at all ages and that women and girls living in rural areas have different learning needs at different times in their lives.

Work with local partners to ensure gender appropriate and sensitive sanitation facilities.

Develop policies and programmes that involve women in the management and provision of accessible, safe, and effective water and sanitation resources. Support policies and programmes which provide rural women and girls with finance and land security, as well as securing a place in decision-making forums at all levels, encouraging more female leadership in organisations pertaining to food and agriculture through mentoring opportunities and training.

Where Soroptimist International Stands

These are the principles that Soroptimist International strongly supports and will advocate for on behalf of Women and Girls in rural areas:

Soroptimist International urges governments, civil society, the private sector, and other relevant partners to support the recommendations contained in the Secretary General's report [Improvement of the situation of women and girls in rural areas](#). Soroptimist International believes that the following require priority measures for action to enable rural women and girls to achieve gender equality and empowerment:

Poverty. Member States and government at all levels must be encouraged to provide women with support through economic and social policies aimed at the eradication of rural poverty, ensuring that social protection is available for the most vulnerable.

Agriculture. Enable women to participate as equal contributors in agricultural and non-farm sectors, providing full and equal rights to land and inheritance, improvement of skills and capacity building through technological, technical, and vocational training, and access to financial and other resources for entrepreneurship.

Water and Sanitation. Engage women in the development of appropriate infrastructures for access to clean and safe water, and support the improvement of provision of safe sanitation facilities, especially for educational and health institutions.

Education. Quality education accessible beyond primary stages, can be regarded as one of the major pillars of social protection, offering women and girls the opportunity to fulfil their potential, engage in social entrepreneurship or find meaningful employment. Recognise the fundamental importance of educating rural women and girls to achieve gender equality, enabling them to regularly and safely attend educational institutions.

Soroptimist International supports the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through its Federations, Unions, Regions Clubs, by working on the ground with partner organisations and UN agencies to Educate, Empower and Enable women and girls everywhere