

ENABLING RURAL WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT:

INSTITUTIONS, OPPORTUNITIES AND PARTICIPATION

Study Paper for the International Grail

Based on the theme for the 56th meeting of the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women

"The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges."

(Derived from a background paper developed by Catherine Hill of Canada for an Expert Group Meeting in preparation for the CSW.)

The background paper for this set of questions is available by using the link: <http://grail-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Enabling-Rural-Women-Economic-Empowerment.pdf> or by going to the Grail website (www.grail-us.org) under the heading "What We Do/Grail Link to the UN".

Suggested process:

1. Read the introduction on the next page.
2. Pick three or four questions from those provided that interest you or your group and read the pages related to the question from the full paper (sent as a pdf).
3. Research your answer and dialog with others in your group about the issues raised.

Around the world, resilient and resourceful rural women contribute in a multitude of ways through different livelihood strategies to lifting their families and communities out of poverty. They work as unpaid and own-account¹ or self-employed² on-farm and non-farm laborers; on- and non-farm wage laborers for others in agriculture and agro-industry; as entrepreneurs, traders, and providers of services; as leaders; as technology researchers and developers; and as caretakers of children and the elderly (FAO 2011a). They work in permanent and temporary employment³ and work along a rural-urban continuum and cross-border context, with increasing numbers of rural women migrating for daily, seasonal, or permanent work in urban areas.

Rural women work long hours and many of their activities are not defined as “economically active employment” in national accounts but are essential to the well-being of their households (FAO, 2011a). They also constitute a significant proportion of the labor on their family farms – whether producing for household consumption or for enterprise or both (UNIFEM, 2005). Their potential to do so is limited by multiple and diverse constraints by persistent structural gender disparities that prevent them from enjoying their economic and other rights (e.g. those outlined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Beijing Platform for Action).⁴ They are hampered in their ability to access decent work which they could leverage to improve their economic and overall well-being and importantly their social advancement and political participation (FAO/IFAD/ILO, 2010b). Rural women are constrained by unequal access to productive resources and services and inadequate or inaccessible infrastructure. The limitations rural women face in turn impose huge social, economic, and environmental costs on society as a whole and rural development in particular including lags in agricultural productivity.

Economic empowerment is important as a means for guaranteeing families’ secure livelihoods and overall well-being.⁵ Rural women’s economic empowerment can have a positive impact on, and is interconnected with, their social and political empowerment, through their increased respect, status, and self-confidence and increased decision-making power in households, communities, and institutions. While there is a strong “business case” for addressing rural women’s economic empowerment – namely alleviating poverty⁶ and hunger vis-à-vis all of the Millennium Development Goals, but particularly MDG 1, there is an equally important argument for pursuing the goal of rural women’s empowerment in and of itself in accordance with internationally agreed human rights treaties including those focused more specifically on women’s rights including CEDAW.

¹ Own-account workers are usually defined as a sub-category of the self-employed, i.e. self-employed workers without employees (ILO, KILM 5th edition). The terms ‘own-account workers’ and ‘self-employed workers’ are used interchangeably throughout the text.

² FAO/ILO 2011 notes that most rural workers are self-employed whether on their own small-scale (or family) farms or in micro and small-enterprises in non-farm activities.

³ The term, rural employment is defined as any activity, occupation, work, business or service performed by rural people for remuneration, profit, social or family gain, or by force, in cash, or kind, including under a contract of hire, written or oral, expressed or implied, and regardless if the activity is performed on a self-directed, part-time, full-time or casual basis... It comprises agricultural employment – including both on-farm self-employment and wage employment in the agricultural sector, as well as non-agricultural employment, which includes non-farm self-employment and wage employment (FAO/IFAD, 2011).

⁴ CEDAW Article 14 is the only article in international law addressing the rights of rural women. It commits States Parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas.

⁵ The right to decent livelihood is crucial to women and men around the world. Farmers, workers, peasants, and the urban poor have all fought for the right to “livelihood”, but it still is not an internationally recognized human right, nor does it have an internationally agreed upon definition.

1. What economic global trends and policies, such as free trade, investment liberalization, systems deregulation and privatization most impact rural women in your country? (pages 5-6)
2. What other global factors such as population trends, migration and climate change most impact the economic security of rural women in your region or country? (pages 6-7)
3. What leadership and decision-making roles does your group discern for women in responding to financial, food and fuel crises in your part of the world? (page 7)
4. What policies affect food prices in your nation? How are issues of hunger and poverty addressed? What percentage of your nation's farmers are women? (page 8)
5. How much time do you or women you know spend on food preparation for your/their household compared to the amount of time other members of the household spend on food preparation? (page 10)
6. Are there groups such as unions in your country that advocate for the rights of agricultural and other rural workers? What are they and what is their impact for women workers? (page 12)
7. What data is available from government or academy or NGOs about the status of women workers in rural industries? How are conditions made known and evaluated? (page 16)
8. What percentage of the land is owned by women in your country? Are there innovations to increase ownership by women? (page 17)
9. Is there equal access to education for girls as well as boys in your country? What factors account for the parity or disparity? (page 18)
10. What good practices might be adopted in your country to ensure better access to health care, transportation and other services for rural women and families? (page 22)
11. Are you or women you know using clean energy efficient stoves or other energy saving equipment? (page 24)
12. Are there unique ways that women make use of natural resources sustainably in your land, such as the female shepherds in Chiapas, Mexico? (page 27)
13. What strategies are being formulated by women in your area to mitigate or adapt to the effects of climate change? (page 28)
14. What governmental programs in your country are you aware of that have improved women's capacity to continue education and hold employment such as Brazil's Bolsa Familia and Mexico's Program for Infant and Childcare? (pages 34-35)
15. How do you and your organization work in the areas listed under local level? (pages 38-39)