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Migiro calls for systematic strategies to empower women in rural areas



Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro. UN Photo/JC McIlwaine

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Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro today called for systematic and comprehensive strategies to empower women in rural areas to maximize their potential to combat extreme poverty and hunger, and help them facilitate sustainable development in their communities.

“If rural women had equal access to productive resources, agricultural yields would rise and hunger would decline,” Ms. Migiro [told](#) delegates at the opening of the 56th two-week session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which got under way at UN Headquarters today.

“Yet the reality is that rural women and girls have restricted access to land, agricultural inputs, finance, extension services and technology. Rural women also face more difficulty in gaining access to public services, social protection, employment, and markets,” she said.

The commission’s latest session focuses on the role of rural women and their contributions to fighting poverty and hunger, and how they can be empowered to become effective catalysts of sustainable development.

Ms. Migiro said that rural women must first be recognized as key agents of change. Support for their organizations can help ensure that rural women’s priorities are reflected in macroeconomic policies and rural development and agricultural programmes, she said.

She called for a re-examination of financing for rural development, agriculture and climate change mitigation and adaptation to ensure that it prioritizes rural women and girls.

“We need to give greater attention to infrastructure projects, water schemes, renewable energy sources and biodiversity protection,” said Ms. Migiro, noting that only five per cent of agricultural extension services go to women farmers.

Noting that “ad-hoc interventions” are insufficient, the Deputy Secretary-General called for a broader policy environment that is responsive to the rights and needs of rural women and girls.

“States must abolish discriminatory laws and policies, such as those that limit women’s rights to land, property and inheritance, or that restrict their legal capacity.

“This session of the Commission on the Status of Women is an opportunity to solidify consensus among governments and civil society on those actions needed to make a real difference in the lives of rural women,” she added.

The President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Miloš Koterec, also stressed in his statement to the CSW session that the empowerment of rural women demands comprehensive strategies that address obstacles that they face.

“Policy-makers must therefore adopt a systematic approach for the empowerment of rural women and ensure that the broader policy environment is responsive to the rights and needs of rural women and girls,” he said.

Michelle Bachelet, the Executive Director of the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), said empowering women requires a transformation in the way governments devise budgets and make and enforce laws and policies, including trade and agricultural policies, and how businesses invest and operate.

“If we are serious about this mission, this responsibility, if we are serious about empowering rural women and unleashing their potential, then we have to remove the barriers that stand in their way,” she [said](#).

“We have to remove the structural, cultural, social and economic barriers that prevent rural women from participating fully in the economic and political life of their countries.

“And we continue to fail rural women when they die during childbirth, are shut out of decision-making, and cannot lead healthy and productive lives free of violence and discrimination. Let us be clear. This is not just hurting the women. It is hurting all of us!” said Ms. Bachelet.

According to UN Women, rural women make up one fourth of the world’s population. Some 86 per cent of the global rural population of the both genders derives its livelihood from agriculture, with an estimated 1.3 billion people engaged in small-scale farming or working as landless labourers.

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